Lilith

the independent Jewish women's magazine

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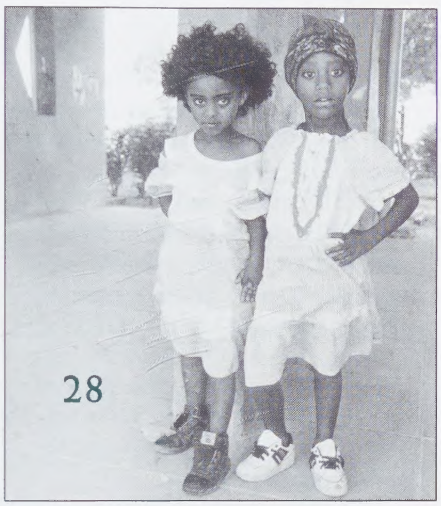

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To contact LILITH: 250 West 57th Street, Suite 2432, New York, NY 10107 Phone: (212) 757-0818 Fax: (212) 757-5705 e-mail address: lilithmag@aol.com

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IN OUT

from the editor

"When I went to Israel last summer with my youth group I was totally excited to have our first Shabbat at the Western Wall. When I got there all the girls could do was watch from the women's side of the *mechitza* while all our guy friends were having the peak Jewish experience of their entire lives!" Unfortunately, this plaint is not unusual. The energy and funding focused on giving teens a trip to Israel often fails to prepare them adequately—leaving girls, for instance, desolate and confused over the exclusion of women from public prayer at the Wall.

Look at clothing catalogs, popular music and TV sitcoms. You might think that teen girls are taking up all the available oxygen. But look again. While teenage girls have become a huge market for new products, studies show that American girls, who by and large feel good about themselves in their elementary school years, suffer diminished self-esteem in early adolescence and don't recover those positive feelings about themselves through high school. Despite the current intense attention to girls as consumers, the internal life of teen girls—including Jewish girls, who wrestle with a whole range of issues from stereotyping to religious participation—remains mysterious.

We need to hear girls' voices and their needs. A comprehensive 1996 monograph, The Jewish Youth Databook, reports the results of numerous surveys of Jewish youth by denomination, by geography, by levels of Jewish education, by parents' financial status, *but not by gender*. Yet we know (from the story of the young women at the Wall, among other examples) that the experiences of Jewish girls and boys often differ. Similarly, a just-released study of organizations and synagogues for Young Judaea puts out a call for more and improved "youth services" without realizing that the services provided for girls and for boys may need to be quite different. And a December 1998 announcement from the Reform movement, acknowledging that it is "failing to actively engage the majority of teenagers past the age of 13" doesn't note that there may be significant differences in what teen *girls* want from their Jewish educational experiences.

The invisibility of girls extends to funding. Less than 5% of all foundation funding goes to women and girls; some claim that in the Jewish community the percentage is even lower, with only a tiny fraction of this already small fraction going to girls. But today the tide may be changing. **The Chicago Jewish Women's Foundation has just made its historic first set of grants to projects which will enhance the lives of Jewish women and girls, and LILITH is among the first grantees the trustees of this exciting new foundation have chosen to support!** Over the coming year LILITH will explore what programs and projects successfully respond to the needs of Jewish teen girls in those vulnerable years between Bat Mitzvah and the end of high school.

The timing could not be better. In five years, the teen population will peak in the U.S., with the largest number of teens ever, children of the baby boomers. LILITH's work right now—uncovering programs that work for teen girls and writing about them—can change the climate for the large numbers of Jewish teen girls who will be coming of age as we round the corner into the new millennium. We have a window of opportunity to help re-frame how the Jewish community engages our girls.

Celebrate this grant with us. Make a tax-deductible contribution to LILITH for the girls' project (to honor a young person, perhaps). And join this special effort by informing us about projects that hear girls' concerns and help Jewish teen girls see for themselves a woman-positive Judaism.

Susan

—Susan Weidman Schneider

Lilith

In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple... The Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."
(from The Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b)

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"The Voices of Women." Traditionally, the voice of the Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. No more. These pages are for news about Jewish women, in our own strong voices.

Women of Letters

It has been a milestone year for Jewish women writers and the Jewish Book Council. Fully 50% of the winners at the 49th Annual National Jewish Book Awards were women, and feminist interests were widely discussed during the April 1999 award presentations.

Amidst a conservative backlash attempting to discredit women's Holocaust studies [see LILITH, Fall 1998], **Marion Kaplan's** deeply gender-sensitive book *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* took the prize in Holocaust studies.

In presenting an award to **Leon Wieseltier** for *Kaddish,* his exhaustive and personal investigation into the meaning of the mourner's prayer, LILITH Board member **Francine Klagsbrun** specifically commended his support of women's reciting of the prayer, still hotly debated in some circles.

Accepting the award in Jewish Thought for her revolutionary book *Engendering Judaism* [reviewed in LILITH, Fall 1998], feminist theologian **Rachel Adler** noted with glee that "women have finally talked their way in and become equal partners."

Most significant, perhaps, was the introduction of a brand new prize in Women's Studies. Named the **Barbara Dobkin** Honorary Award, this award was created by friends and supporters of the feminist activist and philanthropist whose visionary support for an extraordinary range of Jewish feminist projects (LILITH included) has made possible a whole new set of possibilities for women in Jewish life. The prize this year went to **Paula Hyman** and **Deborah Dash Moore**, editors of the two-volume *Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia.*

Political Chutzpah

As part of a campaign to increase the number of women candidates in this May's Israeli election, the Coalition of Women's Organizations for the Advancement of Women in Politics sponsored a series of advertisements "placing politicians' heads on women's bodies." Featured on TV and in the press as part of the election analysis, the ads were also signed by Wizo, Na'amat and the Israel Women's Network. The headlines read (top right) "There Are Things…That Only a Woman Can Do!"; (left) "Gentlemen, It Is Impossible Without Ladies!"; and "A Woman's Place Is—In the Kitchen Cabinet!"

The Difference: Men and Women at Passover, and Beyond

I teach at URI—University of Rhode Island. This year, three important events and one meeting I should have attended were scheduled for the afternoon of March 31, directly before the beginning of Pesach.

I was very puzzled by this, because in each case the Gentile convenors of the events were people whom I knew to be sensitive to Jewish concerns. One was our Protestant chaplain, another was our director of the Multicultural Center and another was my department chair. When I asked them why they had scheduled events on the afternoon before Passover, each one told me that they had consulted Jewish members of each of the groups and in every case the Jews—all males—told them that our holiday didn't start until sunset, so they could schedule the meetings. When I asked my Jewish colleagues why they had given this misleading information to our Gentile colleagues, they were annoyed that I'd make an issue of this. I wonder how they would have reacted if their wives had taken similarly cavalier attitudes to the preparation of the Seder meal.

Oyyyyyyyy!

If you ask most Jewish men if the afternoon before Passover is an acceptable time to have a meeting, they will almost invariably say "yes" because what most Jewish men do on Passover is show up at the dining table, fork in hand. I have explained to each of the Gentiles involved that most women, even marginally observant women, engage in extensive preparations, including cleaning, ritual cleaning as well as the preparation of the biggest feast in the Jewish calendar. As a result of this experience, I have prepared a guide to the Jewish holidays. I plan to publish it twice a year on our faculty e-mail list, before the High Holydays and Pesach, every year until I retire!

Here I will just say: Oyyyyyyyyyyy-yy

Women at War

In September 1945, Gertrude Shapiro went to Hiroshima as part of the first American medical group sent to aid in relief efforts after the dropping of the atomic bomb. The photo (at center right) and Shapiro's story are part of a new exhibit at the National Museum of American Jewish Military History, "Women in the Military: A Jewish Perspective." More than 50 Jewish women are featured in the show, which includes photos and stories of their service in American conflicts, from the Civil War through the present, and traces their confrontation with sexism and anti-Semitism along with their military endeavors.

Among the little known facts included in the exhibit:

- There were more than 340,000 women serving in the American forces during World War II. More than half of those were *not* nurses.
- 12 Jewish women were among the first graduating class of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, a team of female soldiers (initially unpaid!) created in the wake of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.
- In WWI, the secretary of the Navy recruited women to serve as intelligence, fingerprints experts, camouflage designers and other on-shore staff.

Rabbi Bonnie Koppell joined the Army Reserves in 1979 while a rabbinical student at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and, upon her ordination, became the first female Jewish chaplain ever to serve in the United States military. "No one prays for peace with more fervor than the soldier who stands ready to lay down his or her life for our country," she has explained about her service. "Yet I am not a pacifist; I believe that there are times when war is justified."

"Women in the Military" will be on view at the NMAJMH through the year 2000. The museum is located at 1811 R Street, NW, Washington, D.C. For more information, call (202) 265-6280.

World War I servicewomen in full dress (circa 1918).

Rabbi Bonnie Koppell conducts a Havdalah service at Ft. Huachuca, Arizona (1992).

Gertrude Shapiro with natives of Hiroshima, Japan (October 1945). Shapiro was part of the first medical landing group of Americans assigned to treat Japanese patients suffering from the effects of the atomic bomb.

Yetta Moskowitz (center) pictured with two other flight nurses at the Air Evacuation School in Lexington, Kentucky (1944). In the foreground is Lt. Beatrice "Bobby" Memler, a Jewish-American flight nurse killed in action in Mindano, Philippines.

In Elsinore, Israeli & Palestinian Educators Learn Tolerance

"Terrorist," "primitive," "patriarchal," arrogant," "untrustworthy." These are just some of the stereotypes that a group of Israelis and Palestinians came up with during a workshop on mutual misperceptions at a conference in Elsinore, Denmark—home to Hamlet's castle and, for two weeks, some 30 Middle Eastern educators.

Through Netivot Shalom, the religious peace group I was representing, I had met with Palestinians in various venues over the years. In Denmark, however, I discovered that we are often unaware that stereotypes exist until they are challenged; mine were about Palestinian women. I had believed that they were fairly inconspicuous and submissive within their patriarchal society. These images were broken as I became acquainted with the powerful and impressive Palestinian women whom I met.

- Sanaa, open, pregnant and mother of two, teaches English to adults in Ramallah. I noticed her on the first evening during a cultural event on humour. As was fairly typical, the men took center stage during the ad-hoc telling of jokes. Among the women, only Sanaa joined in, feeding us one joke after another with great softness and warmth. Sanaa's courage was brought home to me later as we made plans to see a movie together in Jerusalem; she casually mentioned climbing over army checkpoints on her way to the movies or the shopping mall.
- Tania, in her early 30s, also from Ramallah, had just been appointed deputy-head teacher at a school, bypassing older and more experienced candidates. She was now considering how to deal with the jealousy and anger of several male colleagues. The ease with which Tania, like Sanaa, dealt with the dual demands of family life and career—with no fraught dilemma—and with the support of their husbands, surprised me.
- For Kifah, a Palestinian teacher in her 40s, motherhood played center stage as she expressed her worry and anger about her son. He had been celebrating his 16th birthday in a cafe in West Jerusalem the previous week when his ethnicity was discovered and he was beaten up. She was awaiting the results of his CAT scan.
- Mona, from East Jerusalem, with her carefully considered and confidently expressed views, quickly became the unofficial leader of the Palestinian delegation. The business editor of a Palestinian weekly newspaper, she has just set up a newspaper for Palestinian youth.

These women returned to Israel with me, inside of me, substantially changing my own attitudes and images of Palestinian women. They were neither prominent nor unusual in their community, just successful professionals similar to me and my colleagues. I realized that the pictures I had had—similar, I suspect, to those of many other Israelis—were no more than cumbersome stereotypes.

—Nicky Lachs

Entrepreneur's Elbow Grease Helps Shelters Shine

At 27, her husband left her with two small children and "a shoebox full of bills." In search of a job where she could bring her children along, (the youngest was one month old), Joy Krause started cleaning houses. Over the next 20 years, Krause transformed her one-woman cleaning team into one of the biggest cleaning businesses in the northeastern United States.

After selling the business three years ago and a chance visit to a children's homeless shelter, Krause knew what her next project would be: philanthropic cleaning. Late last year she started the Sparkle America project, for which she travels to children's shelters all over the country, cleaning them and providing warmth to the children. By garnering local media coverage each time she visits a shelter, Krause hopes to raise the public's awareness of the desperate need: for money, volunteers, and foster parents who can provide a "safe, loving home."

Italian Catholic by birth, Krause converted to Judaism when she married her second husband. In her recently published book, *Spring Cleaning for the Soul,* a collection of lively stories about past customers and life experiences, Krause recalls her moments under the *huppah*. "During the ceremony, my husband smashed a glass with his foot.... My mother, thinking a chalice had dropped accidentally, ran under the *huppah* to pick up the sharp pieces before someone hurt themselves. The startled rabbi, who was just about to wish us *L'Chayim* and *Mazel Tov*, was speechless and never did get around to the marriage blessing." On a more serious note, Krause writes, "What I learned from being Jewish was to keep an open mind about all religions because we are probably more alike than not."

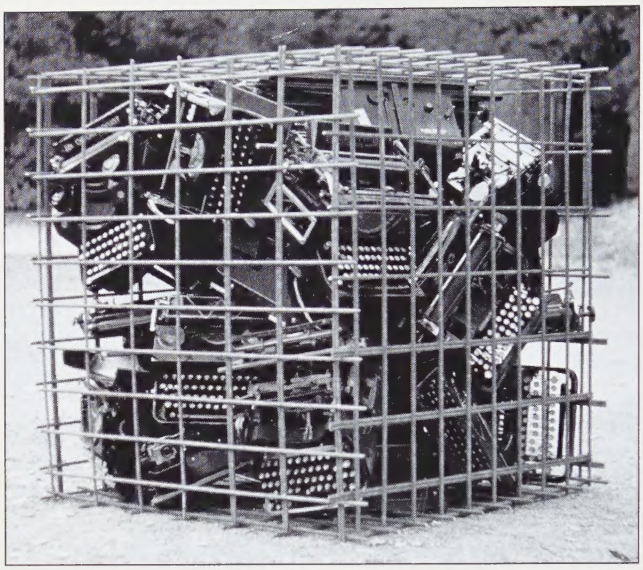
—Anna Shpayer

To join the Sparkle America Campaign, call (800) 791-8799.

Artist Memorializes Berlin Book Burnings

"Else Lasker-Schueler was a renegade. She was a painter. She was a writer. She was an independent woman, proud to be Jewish at a time when it was difficult."

Berlin-based artist and writer Sheryl Oring might have been talking about herself, though in fact she is talking about a predecessor from a much more dangerous time. In early May, Oring was scheduled to commemorate Lasker-Schueler and other persecuted writers of pre-war Germany with her large outdoor artwork entitled "Writer's Block."



HANSBOES

Her installation comprises a sea of metal cages crammed with old manual typewriters. The sight of these antiquated machines behind bars is disturbing, particularly given their location—Bebelplatz, where 66 years ago, on May 10, 1933, the Nazis burned thousands of books by Jewish, communist and other authors. The exhibit was sure to touch an exposed nerve at a time when the city of Berlin has been severely shaken by the debate over how—or whether—to memorialize the Holocaust.

Oring began work on "Writer's Block" three years ago, when she was a writer-in-residence at an artists' colony in Southern California. Her rustic cabin had no electricity, so Oring wrote on a manual typewriter. "Over time, the typewriter came to symbolize freedom for me," she reflected recently.

It was a period of transition for Oring, who was then separating from her husband and leaving a secure job at the San Francisco Chronicle for the uncertainty of the creative life. Oring, who grew up in North Dakota and is half Jewish—of Rumanian Jewish ancestry on her father's side—studied German and German history in college. After moving to Berlin in 1997, she began collecting German typewriters of the 1920s and 1930s and conceiving of an installation that would protest censorship.

Bebelplatz is a mile away from the site of the proposed Holocaust memorial that has stirred much debate. "It's an interesting time to do a project like this," Oring said, "because there's so much controversy in Berlin and in Germany about the role of history and whether they want their art and their culture to be looking backwards instead of forwards."

Still, Oring received an outpouring of help from both public and private sources, from the Checkpoint Charlie Foundation in Berlin to Media Alliance in San Francisco. A German company offered to produce her Web site. The Freedom Forum in Washington, D.C., promised to buy four of her cages for the Newseum in Arlington, Virginia. When she put out a call for typewriters, the response was "amazing....Hundreds of people donated typewriters, including many older people who were witnesses to this time." With this support, Oring hopes to take her cages on the road, to other cities throughout Germany where book burnings took place.

Oring takes a special interest in what happened to women writers who attracted Nazi attention, like Lasker-Schueler, who fled to Switzerland in 1933, and others like Rosa Luxemburg, Anna Seghers, Vicki Baum, and Nelly Sachs. A Jewish poet, Sachs fled with her mother to Stockholm in 1940; the rest of her family died in concentration camps. In 1966 she won the Nobel Prize for Literature, but, as Oring notes, "Sachs remains relatively obscure." With the exception of Rosa Luxemberg, so do the others.

"Many of the men retained their status in the world of literature, while the women somehow lost the small gains they had made in the early 20th century," she said. "Their words are mostly forgotten. I'm hoping that through this project I can somehow bring attention to these women, and maybe find a way to arouse interest in their words, their lives and histories."

—Brady Kahn

Plays on History

The stories Jewish writers from Nazi-era Germany have captured the imagination of a number of contemporary playwrights:

- "Berlin, Jerusalem & the Moon" recalls the disparate stories of assimilationist writer Walter Benjamin and religious poet Else Lasker-Schueler, members of the German Jewish literati who fled the Nazis. The play has been produced by A Traveling Jewish Theater—which does travel. *David Hyry & Associates, 1810 Harrison St., San Francisco, CA 94103; (415) 864-3547; www.atjt.com*
- "The Angel of History," a play by Roberta Spivek and Craig Eisendrath, explores the capacity for resisting evil through the story of anti-fascist activist Lisa Fittko and Walter Benjamin, who risked his life for a cherished manuscript. *Roberta Spivek, phone/fax (215) 413-1461; rspivek@aol.com*
- "Exile in Jerusalem," by leading Israeli playwright Motti Lerner, follows poet Lasker-Schueler as she tries to rebuild her life in Palestine after fleeing the Nazis in 1939. *Flora Roberts agency (212) 355-4165*

כתב עת פמיניסטי

NOGA, ISRAEL'S FEMINIST MAGAZINE

This page is the second in a series that highlights Noga, the Hebrew-language feminist journal, which has been publishing in Israel for 20 years. It is edited by Rachel Ostrowitz, Mira Ariel, Rachel Giora, Erela Daor, and Miri Krasin and funded by U.S./Israel Women-to-Women. LILITH believes it's important to hear Israeli women's views directly from their own feminist publication. These nuggets, prepared and translated by **Naomi Danis**, are from Noga's Spring '99 issue.

RUTO MODAN

THE REASONABLE WOMAN IN COURT

by Dafna Barak-Erez

What would a reasonable person expect, understand, do or avoid doing in a given situation? Our assumptions of what is reasonable behavior affect criminal justice. Do our assumptions take into account the different life experiences of women and men?

Take, for example, a defendant who claims self-defense for a murder. Wouldn't a reasonable person try to escape the scene of an attack, avoid a known provocateur, and return fists only with fists and not escalate to the use of a lethal weapon? **These assumptions of reasonable behavior don't seem so reasonable when the attack takes place in the home a woman shares with her attacker, and when she is responsible for the care of her children.**

In a similar vein, Barak-Erez analyzes the notion of reasonable behavior expected of a crime victim in the case of rape.

Rather than have a distinct set of expectations for women, Barak-Erez advocates more openness in the justice system so that those making judgements see outside of their own immediate circle and take into account the multicultural society in which we live.

In a complementary article, **Ayelet Golan-Tavory** shares findings of a study sponsored by the Israel Women's Network by Rena Bogush of Bar Ilan University and Rahel Don-Yechiah of Tel Aviv University to see if and how gender affected the legal process and its results. (Among the observations: that female attorneys—as compared to their male peers—are often addressed by judges in a way that undermines their clients' confidence in them.)

THE ASSASSINATION OF RABIN: A PROVOCATIVE INTERPRETATION

In an excerpt from her book, *Next Pesach: Women and Literacy in Religious Zionism,* **Tamar Elor** compares the assassination of Yitzchak Rabin to a murder committed to preserve family honor. She uses this metaphor to illuminate some of the political-ideological thinking that led to the murder and that guided the ensuing national mourning for the victim. In this parallel, **the assassination is seen as the successful erasing from history of "illicit relations" that the government had conducted in its peace initiative with the Palestinians.** (Elor's book will appear in English next year from Wayne State University Press.)

THE EQUATOR by Elite Avni

"And so, my learned colleagues, it is possible to solve the world energy crisis in five days!"

"Yeah, sure. Let's see how long it takes her to change a light bulb!"

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COURTESY RAWA

THE INVISIBLE WOMEN OF AFGHANISTAN

by Erella Daor

Females may not work outside the home, leave home without being accompanied by a male family member, go to school, receive medical care from male medical personnel or seek medical care without being accompanied by a male relative. Women may not use birth control. A women has no legal rights and may seek legal action only if a male family member represents her. All cultural and sports institutions are closed to women.

Discrimination? Segregation? Sexual apartheid? These terms all seem inadequate to describe the total abrogation of women's basic human rights, according to Daor, who writes based on information supplied by RAWA, a group of revolutionary Afghani women refugees in Pakistan.

The Taliban, an extreme fundamentalist group, bases these restrictions on its understanding of Muslim law or *shaaria.* The Taliban continues to battle other Muslim fundamentalists since the 1989 routing of the Soviet-backed communist regime, which had been in power since 1978. Since 1994 the Taliban has reigned over 80% of Afghanistan.

The egregious treatment of women in this ravaged country—which has expelled many of the non-governmental organizations that sought to feed and care for the needy there—is now the subject of a worldwide public opinion campaign. It is hoped that the Taliban regime, which seeks UN recognition as well as trading partners, will succumb to world pressure to grant women their basic human rights.

letters

Lilith welcomes letters to the editor, articles, fiction, poetry and memoirs. We reserve the right to edit letters for syntax and length.

Female Mohels

Why is it that women tend to make themselves feel more "a part of the world" by emulating men and male behavior? Having women *mohels* ["When the Mohel Is a Woman," Spring 1999] goes so against the grain of my soul I had to speak out. This is ritual at its finest. The ritual mutilation of our infant boy babies. Thank goodness these female *mohels* haven't decided to make our little girls feel more a part of Judaism by mutilating their genitals.

We are made in God's image. We are perfect just the way we are born, all of us, male and female, without sacrificing any body parts. I would have loved any *mohel* to perform a ritual blessing over my child, but they were not welcome with their knives. I look forward to the day when no infant, no matter what the religion, must be mutilated in order to belong.

Miriam Edell
Cottage Grove, OR

I am writing to express my dismay regarding your article about women serving as *mohels*. The article presents this role as a step forward for women in a male-dominated ritual. However, it never questions the basis of that ritual. Why is it okay to protest female genital mutilation while celebrating the same thing when done to boys? Why do we rail against female genital mutilation when it is done in the service of religion (the Koran stipulates that the top 1/3 of the hood of the clitoris be removed) but celebrate it when done with males?

If boys are indeed born "imperfect," as *mohelet* Debra Schlossberg suggests, then it would follow that the hoods of girls' clitorises are indeed "imperfections" subject to removal as well. After all, when the genitalia differentiate in the womb, it is the same tissue that develops into the foreskin and the clitoris hood.

I am surprised the psychoanalyst in your article didn't comment on the males' "irrational" (as Philip Roth puts it) need to perpetuate the mutilation that was done to them. Why would it be so intolerable, as Roth observes even in his secular friends, for their sons to have complete penises when they do not?

Wouldn't a more feminist step ahead be to have similar baby-naming ceremonies to welcome Jewish baby boys and girls into the world, rather than persist in cutting off body parts?

Jennifer Taub
Burlington, VT

Women in the Spanish Civil War

I have to tell you how small is the world of Jewish women. First, I found someone on the Donor list in the current issue whom I know in her professional capacity. I'm a longtime subscriber, and I enjoyed seeing the name of Reva Felder, and have written her a note to tell her so.

The bigger surprise was in the article on women in the Spanish Civil War, "Fighting Fascism," by Ian Halpern [Spring 1999]. He quotes Virginia Malbin extensively. I think this is the woman who lived across the hall from me at 1168 East 54th Place, Chicago, in the Hyde Park neighborhood, when I moved there as a bride in 1941. I remember her and her husband, who was a physician. She seemed very mature and sophisticated to me, and if it is in fact the same person, she would be very old now, since I am 81. We lived there until 1950, but the Malbins moved away before my husband was drafted. I do remember that after they moved some government types came around and asked me questions about them, but I knew nothing of their activities nor their beliefs. I don't know whether it's possible to make contact, but I had to tell you about the long reach of LILITH.

Shirley Gould
Skokie, IL

Leafing through your article on the Spanish Civil War, I saw my aunt in a photograph of nurses in capes. She's the prettiest one. Ann Taft was born in 1912, attended the Brooklyn Jewish Hospital School of Nursing, and went to Spain with Fredericka Martin in 1937. I was quite young then. When I was applying to nursing schools, I remember *not* being able to use my aunt Ann as a reference.

My uncle by marriage, Carl Rahman, is in another photograph you used. He's the young man with the cigarette; Evelyn Hutchins, also pictured, was his first wife. He was an ambulance driver and often slept in the garage with his ambulance, so nothing would be stolen.

I remember that Ann brought me a hat and some other goodies from the Basque region of Spain. She had married a surgeon. Freddie Martin married a doctor from Alaska and they lived in Cuernavaca, Mexico. Both are now deceased. Another living aunt, Ethel Taft Powell, remembers sending Ann and Freddie packages of sugar, coffee and other non-perishables unavailable in Spain.

These people never really got any recognition for their contribution to the Spanish Civil War. However, before Ann died she got a lot of the material together that is now at Brandeis University.

It is a pleasure to see your magazine give these brave and generous people such great coverage. Few people remember what they did.

Marian Taft Weinberger
Greensville, SC

Holocaust Distorters

In an article in *Commentary* and again in his letter to LILITH (Winter 1998), Gabriel Schoenfeld quoted entirely out of context a number of passages from my 1993 prize-winning book, *Making Stories, Making Selves: Feminist Reflections on the Holocaust.* One such passage reads: "Linden argues that the ecological impact of 'thousands of pounds of human ash dumped into lakes and rivers' is no less urgent a subject than the study of the Holocaust itself, and inquiry into it would serve usefully to 'decenter narrowly anthropocentric views of human destruction.'"

While I am flattered that Schoenfeld found my book sufficiently riveting to quote from it twice, he has grossly distorted my views. The passage is excerpted from the epilogue, "Genocide/Consequences," which pushes against two major currents in mainstream Holocaust scholarship: the notions that (1) the destruction of European Jewry is the most significant and horrific event of the 20th Century and all of Jewish history—indeed, all of human history; and (2) that research on the Hitler era ought to privilege the destruction of Europe's Jews and, at best, pay lip service to the "others" murdered by the Nazis.

The sentence in question is quoted from a passage in which I reflected on the persistence of genocide throughout recorded history, and on the psychological and moral standpoints that enable more powerful people to kill less powerful people on a massive scale. I suggested that it is not only Jewish victims and survivors who bear the burden of the Holocaust, not Nazi collaborators in more than 20 countries, nor bystanders, nor Gypsies, not the mentally and physically disabled, gay men, communists, socialists, Poles, resisters—in short, "non-Aryans," "asocials," and "deviants." I claimed that these human casualties are only part of the story—that the consequences of the Holocaust are so prodigious that they crossed the human/nonhuman divide and indelibly changed the landscape of our planet.

While there are certainly legitimate counterarguments to this view, Schoenfeld failed to present even one. Perhaps a more thoughtful writer with a less invective agenda might have succeeded.

R. Ruth Linden, Ph.D.
Beatrice M. Bain
Research Group
University of California
Berkeley, CA

Murdering Abortion Providers

Thank you for your words of support and the article "Jewish Doctors at Risk" [Winter 1998]. We are a small, all-volunteer organization that has been quietly working in Western New York to maintain the reproductive rights of women. Dr. Barnett Slepian was an outspoken supporter of reproductive choice and of our organization. He was a compassionate man, beloved by his family, friends, patients and all of us who knew him.

Barnett would often take the time to stop and converse with those opposed to his work as an abortion provider. He was open to hearing their views and hoped they would be open to his. While acknowledging their right to protest, he consistently spoke against their violent and harassing tactics directed at himself, his family and his patients. "When you are using words like 'kill' and 'murder,' that's where it can lead," he stated in a 1995 interview. Tragically, his life was taken just as he warned.

Maria Patrick Oakley
Pro-Choice Network
Buffalo, NY

Remembering Bella

Today, in honor of Bella [Abzug, featured on LILITH's cover, "Big Mouths," Fall 1998] on the anniversary of her passing, I am wearing my T-shirt that says, "Well-behaved women rarely make history" (quoting Laurel Thatcher Ulrich). More importantly, today I renew my promise to live in a way that helps advance the social, political and economic equality and civil rights of all females around the globe. In other words, I promise to be a loud, pushy Jewish woman, like you, fighting for change. Good-bye, Bella, and thank you.

Rebecca Edelson
via e-mail

Corrections

Debbie Weissman was not the first president of Yedidya, a congregation in Jerusalem, nor its first female president.

Ruth Davidow went to Mississippi for the Headstart program, not for voter registration.

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Among the Gypsies

by Toby Sonneman

My father raised me to despise all things German. Never should I forget that it was Germany that had rejected him, ripped away his job and forced him out of his homeland. Never should I forget that Germany was responsible for killing the Jews, our relatives, our people. After my father came to America from Germany in 1939, he spoke German to his parents, but to no one else. Sometimes he would teach my brother, sisters and me a German phrase or two—like *bitte shön* to say "please"—but on the whole, he didn't encourage us to learn German. It was an ugly language, the language of the Nazis, I thought. It left a bitter taste in my mouth when I tried to speak it. My father never bought anything "Made in Germany" and if anyone even mentioned buying a Volkswagen—the very car inspired by the Nazis—he delivered a scathing denunciation.

Born 10 years after my father's arrival in America, I didn't always understand the weight of my father's experiences. When my school friends talked about being part Irish, Italian or French, I wondered if I was part German. But when I came home and asked, my father frowned, his eyebrows lowering ominously. "No! You are all, one hundred percent, American. You are Jewish and you are American. You are not German." First for my father, and then for myself as well, the name of Germany was synonymous with pain. I never would have been drawn to Germany and my own German roots at all—had it not been for the Gypsies.

I can't remember when I first became interested in Gypsies—it seems as if I was always drawn to them—but it was not until I discarded my romanticized notions and recognized their connected history with Jews that I found a purpose to being among them. My own grandfather, a music critic and poet in Mannheim, once published a poem—in German of course—entitled "The Gypsy," about a Gypsy violinist and the pain expressed by his music.

Now I, too, began to learn about the Gypsies' pain. Shocked by the victimization of Gypsies in the Nazi era and the resurgence of violence against them in Eastern Europe since the fall of communism, in 1991 I helped found an international coalition organization of Gypsies and Jews called the Romani-Jewish Alliance and worked to inform the public about the Gypsies' current plight. But still I felt pulled toward the past, hungry to learn more about what has been called "the forgotten Holocaust" of the Gypsies.

I had learned about the Jewish Holocaust through my father's stories and by reading memoirs of Jewish survivors, stories that touched me more deeply than any history book; now I wanted to understand the Gypsy experience on such a personal level as well. But there were very few similar personal accounts of the Gypsies' experiences. Not until recently were the testimonies of Gypsies deemed worth retrieving, and not until recently did Gypsy survivors begin to tell those stories. Besides their fear and superstitions of speaking about personal humiliation and pain, they found no practical or emotional value in the telling. Some survivors had to tell their wrenching stories many times in applications for reparations, to little or no avail. Now they were aging, dying off, and their stories were dying with them.

Though I was determined to help in the effort to record oral testimonies, I didn't know how to locate Gypsy survivors. Few of them lived in the United States, and fewer still were willing to reveal their identity for fear of prejudice, much less talk to a non-Gypsy about their painful experiences. Then, in 1991, I met Reili, a German-born Gypsy woman who lived in the United States. As a child, she had fled with

Because the name "Gypsy" arose from the mistaken idea that this population originated in Egypt and often has been used pejoratively, some have argued for replacing this term with the term "Rom" (singular) and "Roma" (plural). However, those I met in Germany use the term "Sinti" to distinguish themselves from the Eastern European population that uses "Roma." I therefore used the word "Gypsy," still in common use among American Gypsies, to refer to all groups. In so doing, I mean no offense.

her family to Italy, Romania and Yugoslavia, where her family was finally arrested and interned in a concentration camp. Reili wore a gold Magen David on a chain around her neck—"to remember my Jewish friends," she said. She told me long, fascinating stories about her relatives in Germany and their varied experiences of persecution under the Nazis. They would talk to me, Reili said, if we could go to Germany together. They would trust me, she explained—because I was her friend, and because I was a Jew.

In Munich, the city where my father's grandparents, aunts and uncles once lived, I listen to my new friends as they tell me their stories in German, the language I learned to hate. Reili translates into English, but I listen to the sounds of the German too, and watch the expressions on their faces as they talk. Bit by bit, I begin to overcome my bias against the language. Most of the Gypsies I talk to in Germany lost scores of relatives at Auschwitz-Birkenau, where approximately 4,000 Gypsies were murdered in a single night in August 1944. But this isn't true of Rosa, Reili's 72-year old aunt. Though she's a survivor of Auschwitz and other camps, she lost most of her relatives years earlier, in 1941.

Gypsy survivors begin to tell their stories. They speak German, the language I have grown to hate.

Rosa is Austrian-born and belongs to the Sinti, a subclass of the ethnic Gypsy population who settled in Northern Europe in early 1400s. Like the German Sinti I meet, her family contradicts the stereotype of the traveling Gypsies: They had been settled in Vienna for generations, lived in houses rather than Gypsy wagons, and invited their non-Gypsy neighbors to their home for coffee. Rosa shows me a family photograph album from the late 1930s: The people are dressed elegantly, and apart from the men with violins, their appearance flies in the face of Gypsy caricatures. Rosa's sister, a handsome woman with long blond braids, might have been a model "Aryan" with her classic Germanic looks. She holds two smiling young children, Rosa's nephews. I linger at the picture. Looking at Rosa, with her thick dark hair, brown eyes, and walnut-colored skin, I wouldn't have imagined that the woman in the photograph was her sister. The mother and the children look so happy—and so Germanic. The children are even wearing *lederhosen*.

Rosa brings me back to reality. "Dead. All of them. In Litzmannstadt."

In 1940, Rosa's family was sent to Lackenbach (a *Zigeunerlager*, or forced labor camp for Gypsies) and then deported to the Lodz Ghetto in Poland—which the Germans renamed Litzmannstadt—in November of 1941. Rosa, then 17, escaped from the train bound for Lodz by crawling through an air hole.

"I run away. I crawl up and I go. My people goes with the Jewish people to Litzmannstadt—Lodz you say today. Lodz."

While the Jewish ghetto in Lodz existed for four years, the Gypsy section existed for only two months, in 1941. Of the 230,000 original Lodz Jews plus the 25,000 people transported in, only 877 lived to tell about Lodz. No Gypsies survived. Those who hadn't died of typhus were taken to the extermination camp of Chelmno and forced into trucks that served as mobile gas chambers. Rosa drives this point home to me as she shows me her photo album. "Kill all of them, the Jewish people and the Sinti, all of them. All of them!" At each photograph, her finger pauses beside a face, and she tells me a name. Each name is followed by the litany: "*Tot.* Dead. Litzmannstadt."

After her escape from the train bound for Lodz, Rosa went to Munich. There, she knew, was a group of Sinti families whom she could depend on to help her. She was taken in by a Sinti family, and eventually married the young man of the family, who had served in the Germany military. (Gypsies were drafted into the military and were not discharged until 1942. Though some who served were not deported, others were sent to concentration camps still in their military uniforms.)

In December 1942, SS Chief Heinrich Himmler had ordered the deportation of all German Gypsies to Auschwitz. By March 1943 most of the Gypsies in Munich had been arrested and sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where a special camp had been set up for them, composed of 30 damp and filthy barracks in sight of the gas chambers and crematoria. But Rosa, still in hiding, evaded this deportation for about a year—until she gave birth to a son and went to a doctor six weeks later with post-partum complications. The doctor treated her, but reported her as soon as she left the office; she was arrested on the street outside the doctor's office. Though her baby remained safe with her husband's family, Rosa was taken to the police station—and then sent on a transport to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

But how had all this come about? Long before Himmler had given the Auschwitz order, Gypsies had been arrested, sterilized, sent to special concentration camps. And long before Nazis came to power, ever since the Gypsies had arrived from India in the middle of the 13th Century, the Gypsies—along with the Jews—were Europe's scapegoats, discriminated against and persecuted by both church and state. Though Gypsy culture has little in common with Jewish culture, the two groups were bound by their difference from the majority in Europe, and both suffered the effects of xenophobia: marginalization, persecution, and suffering. The Middle Ages brought ludicrous blood libel accusations of child stealing, well-poisoning and cannibalism; in the 1600s, laws in Germany, Finland and England decreed it a hanging offense even to be born a Gypsy. Some places even instituted "Gypsy hunts," declaring "open seasons" when Gypsies could be tracked down and hunted for sport. By the 19th Century, the Romantic interest in the Gypsy as "noble savage" had brought about a diminution of the outright persecution, but Gypsies were never accorded equal status as citizens.

The Nazis believed that "all educated Gypsies and part-Gypsies . . . should as a general rule be sterilized."

The Nazis, then, didn't have to create new legislation against the so-called "Gypsy menace"—it already existed. In Germany, Gypsies were photographed and fingerprinted like criminals from 1922. But with Hitler, a new rationalization was given for persecution: the allegedly inferior racial character of Gypsies. To prove the Gypsies' inferiority, the Racial Hygiene Demographic Biology Research Unit was created to register all of Germany's 30,000 Gypsies and collect genealogical and racial data on them—in order to prove the links between racial characteristics and criminality. Robert Ritter, a psychologist and psychiatrist, headed the project; his colleagues included anthropologists and zoologists. By 1942, Ritter had completed his files and recommended that over 90% of Gypsies be sent to labor camps.

Eva Justin, Ritter's assistant, was an even more treacherous "racial scientist." She had visited Gypsy settlements posing as a missionary, and the Gypsies—never imagining that she worked for the Nazis—had nicknamed her *"Loli Tschai,"* red-haired girl. Eva Justin concluded her research on Gypsies by claiming they could not be integrated. They had a primitive way of thinking, she said, and she recommended that "all educated Gypsies and part-Gypsies of predominantly Gypsy blood, whether socially assimilated or asocial and criminal, should as a general rule be sterilized."

This depraved marriage of Nazi ideology with science and academics led directly to the August night in 1944 known as *Zigeunernacht*, the Gypsy night. Rosa, like several other of the Gypsy survivors I spoke with, was transferred out of Auschwitz in June or July, shortly before the liquidation of the Gypsy camp. Being young and healthy, she was spared execution and sent to the women's camp of Ravensbrück, and from there to another labor camp in Germany. But as she left Auschwitz-Birkenau, she says, she looked at the people who remained behind. They knew they would die, Rosa says, and so they cried out to her: "When you see my husband, tell him. When you see my son or daughter, tell them."

Rosa pauses, her eyes watery, and reaches for another cigarette. "I cannot explain how that was."

"I no like the Germans," Rosa says, frowning severely. She is cooking, a warm potato salad like my father makes, only with the addition of some greens that she calls "field salad.' "It's the Sinti cooking," she says proudly. Her sleeves are rolled up and I can see the faded blue Auschwitz tattoo on her right forearm. The pale numbers are preceded by the letter "Z" for *Zigeuner*, the German word for Gypsy that derives from the Greek root meaning "untouchable." Rosa hates the word *Zigeuner*, which the Nazis seared into her skin to show that they considered her, and all her people, subhuman. She tells me a story about an 80-year old German man who lives in her apartment complex. One rainy day, Rosa's daughter had left a baby stroller in the entryway and the man slapped her. Rosa's daughter slapped him back. Shortly after this incident, Rosa ran into the old man by the mailboxes by the entryway. He eyed the envelope with her pension check. "Why can't I get a pension check when you *Zigeuner* get a pension?" he asked provocatively.

"Why can't you get a pension? I'll tell you why," Rosa snapped back. "It's because you are a Nazi swine. You ever call me a *Zigeuner* again and I will call you a Nazi swine again!"

In her 70s, frail and ailing, Rosa is energized by the force of her anger. Her eyes flash defiantly. "I no like the German people!" she says again, raising her voice emphatically. "Why they kill the Sinti? If a person steals, does something wrong, you put him in jail. But you no take the grandparents, the little babies, kill them all."

On a day when there are no interviews, I walk around Munich—and despite my ingrained attitudes, I find it a charming city with its cobbled streets and steepled churches, lovely parks, beer and wine gardens, toy museum and marionette theater. At the *Viktualienmarkt*, the food market, I admire the stands full of fresh fruits and vegetables, flowers, cheeses, sausages and olives. I stop at a juice stand to order a glass of red currant juice, *Johanisbeersaft*. Drinking it, the deliciously tart flavors awaken the taste buds of my childhood and I remember how my parents grew currant and gooseberry bushes in the backyard of our home on Chicago's South Side. We helped pick and wash and clean the berries so my mother could make gooseberry pie and currant jelly, to recharge my father's culinary memories—the tastes he longed for from his youth in Germany.

For in truth, my father had retained one strong affection for Germany: his love for German food. Crusty breads, kuchens and strudels, rich pies and cookies, sausages and potatoes—he loved them all. Sometimes, in the little kitchen of our red brick house, he would cook *Schmarn*, an eggy scrambled pancake, or make a warm potato salad in vinaigrette. Other times he took the family to a German-style beer garden, where we sat outside beneath ivy-laced stone walls and devoured liverwurst sandwiches on crusty rye bread, washed down with mugs of root beer.

This passion for food seemed to run in the family. My father liked to tell the story about his uncle who would bribe the conductor of the express train to Frankfurt to make an unscheduled stop in his hometown—just so he could get off and have a piece of his mother's currant pie. My Oma baked fresh cherry pies for us in her apartment kitchen, using her special German *Mürbteig* pie crust, a rich, tender crust made with flour, butter, sugar, egg and a touch of brandy.

But when I was a child, washing down my Oma's delicious cherry pie with swallows of brash American Coca-Cola, I never realized how fortunate I was even to know my grandparents, never contemplated their wrenching departure from Germany in 1939—just before all the Jews in Mannheim, including my grandmother's sister whose name I bear—were deported to concentration camps in France. Yet along with the pies and the kuchens, I had absorbed the awful contradiction of my German heritage: the loss of the country where my ancestors had once belonged, the terrible betrayal.

The Gypsies I meet in Germany, still living in the nation that persecuted and murdered their people, have an even more vivid sense of betrayal. Only 5,000 German Gypsies survived the prewar population of 30,000, and most of them continue to live in Germany. When I ask Rosa if she has ever thought of leaving Germany, she just shrugs.

"I hate it, I don't like it," she replies. "Where can I go? I'm old too. I no have nobody." The Gypsies had no Palestine to go to, no relatives in America to support them and help them rebuild their lives. So the survivors returned to live in the country that betrayed them. They speak German and are full German citizens—some have family lines in Germany that go back 500 years—yet they abhor the very idea of Germany. The word "Germans" to them refers only to citizens of Germany who are neither Gypsy nor Jewish; they call themselves "Sinti," always. They never—never—refer to themselves as Germans.

I want to ask Rosa more questions, to somehow understand how it came to be that our dissimilar peoples were forged by the terrible bond of the crematorium. "If we can see the present clearly enough, we shall ask the right questions of the past," says art critic and social historian John Berger. But the Birkenau mud seeps into the present for Rosa, and for me. The present and the past are hopelessly entangled.

So instead of asking more questions, I sit beside her on the sofa, our shoulders touching, and we sip sweet creamy coffee from thin china cups. I offer her slices of *Zwetchgenkuchen*, an exquisite plum torte made only in the fall, that I've bought at the *Konditerei* near her apartment. The cake is one of her favorites, she says, speaking in the fragmentary English that she learned from selling supplies to American soldiers after the war. My great-great-grandmother had published cookbooks in German verse more than a century ago; I draw on my minuscule vocabulary of German to tell her how I learned the recipe for the plum torte from my father and my grandmother, and make it every fall. In turn, she tells me about her recipe for apple strudel.

And as we sit and talk about our recipes and our coinciding histories, I start to see that my bittersweet connection to Rosa is a powerful link for me to the contradictions of the past and the present in Germany. ■

Though no pre-war census of the Romani peoples exists, it is estimated that between 500,000 and 1,000,000 were killed by the Nazis. Romanis call that period "*Porrajmos*," the Devouring. Romani losses, however, are rarely recognized—in large part because survivors have been reluctant to speak about their experiences outside their own communities. Among the more than 50,000 testimonies gathered by the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation since its founding by Steven Spielberg in 1994, have been 255 Sinti and Roma survivors of the Holocaust. One hundred, thirty-five of these survivors are women. Among the testimonies, more than 200 said they were hidden during some period during the war. Some fought with partisans or resistance groups; some were in ghettos; many reported internment in forced labor camps. More than 50 said they were interned in one or more concentration camps, including more than 20 at Auschwitz. The Shoah Foundation has yet to catalogue these testimonies in detail.

To contact the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation about testimonies or educational material, call (818) 777-7802 or write to P.O. Box 3168, Los Angeles, CA 90078.

Toby Sonneman is the author of Fruit Fields in My Blood: Okie Migrants in the West. *A new manuscript,* In the Rain One Sees No Tears, *is based on the stories of Gypsy Holocaust survivors.*

A section exploring the reverberations through a lifetime when a girl's mother dies prematurely

White Butterflies

by Yael Flusberg

JONI LEVY LIBERMAN

What I remember the most about that day are the white butterflies. From my vantage point twelve stories above where she landed in fetal position, like a baby in a deep sleep, they circled her body, celebrating the first day of summer. It was only after I saw them that I noticed the boys playing football in the middle of the street, their game shadowed by the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. They hadn't seen her free fall onto the ledge, damaging the bushes in front of the building where I had grown up. But a man, standing half a block away, did. He looked up, straight at the bedroom window where she had summoned every last bit of courage and jumped, and where I was now hovering.

I had been getting ready to go out on my first date with Jimmy Hawk, after he got off his shift at Key Food. Jimmy had soft blonde hair, the kind that whispered of fingers running through it. We had flirted for months, down by the park at night, and the chess table at dusk. Only at 15 can you flirt for months on end before chancing the single goodnight kiss that begs to be repeated.

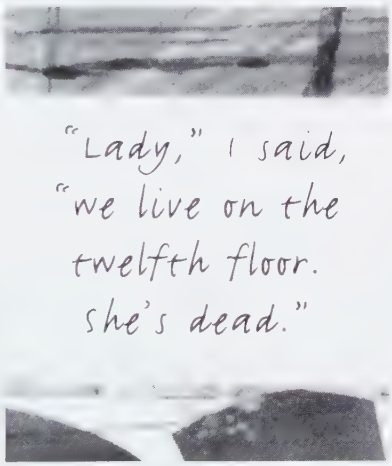
My mother had just gotten out of the hospital two days before. I had become used to the solitude of the apartment in the months she was there, for a gastrointestinal problem that took pounds off her frame and stole her will to live. I had fallen into a comfortable life, commuting to high school in the city, working at the Carvel across from Bloomingdale's, visiting her in the hospital. At first, I visited her daily. Then came her pleas, slowly at first, then more and more demanding. "Darling, help me. I can't live like this anymore. Help me kill myself." I thought that this depression would be short-lived like her other ones, like the breakdown she had when I was ten and cut school by putting the thermometer on the radiator. That was the day she thought it was 1949. This time, I told her what I knew to be true: she would feel better soon. But my assurances failed, and her begging continued.

One day, I wheeled her out to a terrace in the hospital, to get some air, to feel the sun. She wanted me to push her off the ledge. My patience wore thin. I doubted her ability to end her life. I told her to fuck off. That I was tired of her sounding like a broken record. To get a grip. My visits became less frequent. I had finals to study for. I had to work an extra shift, scooping cherry vanilla ice cream for tired shoppers. When I went to the hospital, I would hear her laments made to strangers. An Indian psychiatrist from upstairs. A group of medical interns who surrounded her bed and listened to a senior doctor refer to her simply as "the patient." She didn't care about the stripping of her dignity. I was the one enraged at the doctors, the social workers, the hospital administration who wouldn't tell me what was going on because I was a

minor. She was only aware of how tired she was, how alone she felt after my father died.

She came home when the hospital could no longer justify her being there. To a daughter who didn't understand what had only been discussed from a clinical perspective. To an apartment that had once been a home. She was on more medication than she could keep track of. Anti-psychotics, anti-hallucinogens, anti-inflammatories. They made her tongue swell, provided her with non-stop thirst. Maybe they even eased her physical pain somewhat. None gave her back her life.

The day after she came back, two social workers visited. To make sure she was alright, I suppose, that she knew which medicine was to be taken on an empty stomach, which ones after meals. I left them alone, playing with the alley cat that we had taken in before she had become too sick for me to take care of. Tuxedo, we had named him, for his white paws and tummy, laid against a sleek black body. My mother had fallen in love with him. She hadn't had a pet since she had to leave her own dog with Christian neighbors, at first to move into the ghetto, and later to Auschwitz, where thousands about to go to their deaths were greeted by a sign that read *"Arbeit macht frei"* (work makes you free). I started to come down the hallway, maybe to get a glass of milk, when her pleas to the social workers stopped me cold. The woman's voice drifted through the apartment, gently reminding her that she had a beautiful daughter to live for. That's not enough, I mouthed, seconds before she said it out loud.



The visitors left. That evening, I heard my mother crying. She had tried to get up, to go to the bathroom, she explained. She hadn't made it. It wasn't a big deal, it was easy enough to clean. But she refused comforting.

I decided to go out with Jimmy despite what my neighbors thought, and what the braver ones said to my face, about my not being a good daughter. "She's only been home for two days," they declared in disgust. How could I have explained that I feared she would never get better, that my life was being sucked out of me, that only a kiss would bring it back? I slipped on a pink and white striped miniskirt, smoothed on make up. She said she would be okay. I needed to believe her.

The first day of summer always holds the promise of freedom. From school. From long dark nights. Carefree evenings spent hanging out under the stars, wondering what to do. Teenagers are as bored in New York as they are in other parts of the world, only somehow it seemed a crime to be living in the ultimate urban experience with no more excitement than a joint and the occasional game of pool. I went to her room, with the intention of standing on her bed so I could see how I looked. There were two elliptical mirrors on the wall, five feet long and golden-framed. Between the mirrors was a poster of the Lubavitcher Rebbe that freaked me out every time I saw it, because no matter where in the room you stood, his eyes always seemed to be upon you. I never understood how my parents, self-proclaimed agnostics with a love for shrimp and lobster sauce, could sleep and read and make love under the Rebbe's watchful eye.

Instead, I caught my mother sitting on the window's ledge, her legs dangling on the inside, her torso twisted toward the expressway, staring out. Her expression was peaceful. I asked her not how she had climbed up there, past the nightstand and the air conditioner, with her rheumatism. I asked her why. To get some air, she replied, as I helped her down, and closed the window a touch. We sat on the bed, with its flat wooden boards under the mattress, and for the first time in months, she smiled. She was once a beautiful woman. Her olive complexion and black curly hair made her eyes seem even more blue than they were. I often wondered what her eyes had seen, but it was easier for my friends to ask. I protected her as I imagined she had once protected me, long before that day, when I was still a kid.

She asked me for a favor. I braced myself, and was relieved when it was only to call the social worker, about one medicine or another. Should she take it with a glass of milk or with water? She stroked my hand. The number was in the kitchen. I walked down the same hallway where I had eavesdropped the day before, headed to the phone, and spoke quickly. I returned to an empty room, to a window opened wide. The sun hadn't yet set. I knew that there was no place for her to go, but I couldn't believe. Pausing by the twin mirrors, I asked my reflection what to do. I took myself to the window, and saw the butterflies, heard kids' feet pounding the pavement, trying to catch a ball.

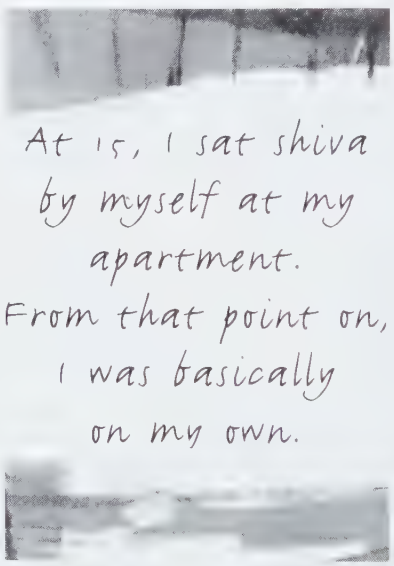
From the window, I grabbed the phone, dialed 911. The only thing I remember about that conversation was the lame assurance on the other end, that my mother would be alright. "Lady," I said, "we live on the twelfth floor. She's dead." Somehow, I remained with her on the phone, until the squad cars arrived below. I hadn't blown my hair yet. I ran down the 12 flights without shoes. The cement walls of the staircase offered me no strength. The cops knew who I was when I got there. A crowd had already formed, the way that they always do when there's something out of the ordinary to check out. I wanted to see her, to see if she was still lying in fetal position, or if she had turned over to the other side. An officer told me not to look, but I walked towards her. I found myself looking into the eyes of Robby Reeman, a boy I hung out with occasionally on Dead Man's Hill, where I had smoked my first joint and drank beer in a clubhouse the generation before mine built as a refuge from invasive families. And just as strongly as I had felt a pull toward her, I was repelled away. I'll never know what the other side of her body looked like, those last moments. All I remember is the appearance of a long-awaited slumber, a final stillness.

Friends arrived and whisked me to the side of the build-

ing, as the ambulance took my mother away. Someone asked me if I wanted to get high. Another asked if she could be buried in a Jewish cemetery, given that suicide is a sin.

The Orthodox rabbi of the Conservative synagogue where I went on holidays, whose only acquiescence to the less religious nature of his congregation was permission for men and women to sit together, must have been called by a neighbor. He told me that in the Hebrew Scriptures, suicide comes up twice. The first incident takes place after Samson is captured, his eyes poked out, and he is moved to a prison in Gaza. He prays to be made strong one last time, and performs the first suicide mission mentioned in the Bible. At a celebration packed with 3,000 Philistines, he pushes the columns holding up the roof with all his might, collapsing the temple and killing himself and all those inside. The second time, it is no less than a king who takes his own life. After fierce battle in which three of his sons are killed, King Saul takes out his own sword, sticks the blade in his stomach, and falls upon it, rather than be captured by the Philistines. In neither instance, the rabbi insisted, does the Torah pass judgement, choosing instead to simply relate historical events.

I spent that night at a friend's house, with whom I had my first sleepover at the age of six, not knowing whether my mother's body would be released for a funeral the next day, or if we would have to wait until after the Jewish Sabbath. New York State law requires autopsies to be performed on all suicide and homicide victims, and since my mother hadn't left a note, the police didn't immediately make a determination as to what—or whom—had killed her. I was questioned by two round-bellied detectives, who provided me with all the cigarettes I could suck down. It was the only solace they could provide, and this was not the time to be stingy, or debate the legalities of a 15-year-old's nicotine addiction. My friend's mom, ever practical, gave me a Valium. I sensed I was falling into a pit, that I would travel through the Underworld and perhaps poke my head out like a groundhog in early February.



We buried her the next morning, on a Friday. Many people showed, but they were mainly there for me. Former teachers and classmates, friends and neighbors. She had no other relatives. In the midst of my Valium hangover, this funeral seemed so much easier than my father's two years before. He had died without warning, of a diabetes-induced heart failure. At his funeral, held on April Fools' Day, a bitter cold wind skirted the headstones at the cemetery. The pallbearers lost balance and, for a moment, I thought my dad would take a flying leap out of the unadorned pine coffin. When they lowered him into the ground, I turned to my mother, and said, not without a hint of malice, "I always thought that you would go first." She nodded her head. He was supposedly the strong one, the caregiver. His sudden death taught me what to expect at hers. Her funeral, and the mourning period that followed, were like a remix of an old song.

I sat *shiva* by myself at my apartment, enjoying recaptured moments of solitude, since there was no one left to mourn her. From that point on, I was basically on my own. I asked prospective visitors to bring cigarettes; there was more than enough food. People came and went. I couldn't sleep more than an hour a night, but I was never really fully awake either. At my tenth year high school reunion, a good friend recalled how her father had insisted he come with her to pay his respects. He sat with me for a long time, saying little. Two years later, in another way, under different circumstances, he too would die by his own hand. My father's relatives, who had kept a respectable distance from my own crazy family, suddenly invaded my apartment, asking for reimbursements for taxi rides to Queens, trying to take control of the situation by searching walk-in closets for important documents. I tried to convince them, now my legal guardians, to sign emancipation papers. To leave me alone. And always there were the whispers that I shouldn't have left her alone.

My mother's name was Edith, the name that the ancient rabbis had bestowed upon Lot's wife, yet another unnamed woman in the Torah. It means "the one who looks back." In the traditional interpretation, Edith is turned into a pillar of salt for disobeying the angels' command to not look behind them, nor stop on the plain, as they escaped to the high country. In a feminist reinterpretation, Ellen Frankel gives voice to Edith's reasons for looking back: "I looked back to all that I had left behind—my other daughter's grave, my friends and relatives, my home with its cherished mementos, my childhood—and I wept. And so hot was the desert sun and the brimstone torching Sodom that my flowing tears dried instantly, turning me into a pillar of salt."

It seemed an ironic twist of fate that my mother, my own Edith, could do nothing but look back. And yet, she had named me Yael, a constant reminder of where I come from, perhaps a premonition of who I was to be. Yael means gazelle, an antelope noted for graceful movements and lustrous eyes. Yet its secondary Hebrew meaning derives from the root "to go up, to rise." In the Book of Judges, Yael, a non-Jewish descendent of Moses' father-in-law, rose up and boldly slew an enemy of the Israelites, for which she is memorialized in poetic battle song. Perhaps, I was the one meant to rise up from my mother's pain, as the white butterflies had on that day. ■

Yael Flusberg is a Washington, D.C.-based writer and activist. She can be reached at Yael36@aol.com.

Can You Be a Family Without a Mother?

A Sociologist Asks Girls About Their Early Losses

by Lynn Davidman

JONI LEVY LIBERMAN

On Sunday morning, November 7, 1993, my father passed away. I was 38, he 71. To say we were not close would be an understatement; he and I had hardly spoken for 20 years. But that night, I accompanied my brothers to Jerusalem, to bury him there, next to the new grave to which my mother's remains had been transferred four years earlier. I had not seen this grave before; I was opposed when my brothers moved her. And that night, at the cemetery where my mom and now dad are buried, I was transformed into the 13- year-old girl whose mother had died. I sobbed, "I want my mom." I cried out in mourning for my lost opportunity to have known my mother, to have her know me now as a woman. And I wondered about the many ways in which my life would have been different—and significantly easier—if my mother had not died when my brothers and I were young.

While I was crying for my mom, women in my extended family surrounded me, held and comforted me. My older and younger brothers were there, crying for my father, but they did not react to the expression of my long-held grief about my mother. We had never talked about our mother before and were not about to then. But later, replaying that cemetery scene in my mind and trying to fathom my brothers' reactions, I began to wonder not only about myself, but about how their lives would have been different if our mom had not died of cancer at the age of 36.

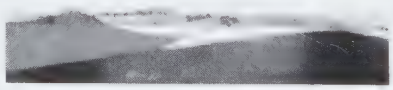
Pondering the ways in which the premature loss of my mother has shaped me as a woman has troubled me for 25

years. But after my father's funeral another question struck me: how did the loss of our mother when we were so young affect my brothers' lives as men? How did our experiences compare with those of other adults whose mothers died when they were children?

My passion to answer these questions led me to research *Motherloss*, a book about to be published that is the first full-length sociological study of this experience. I have sought to interpret our experiences through a continuous movement between my own memories and feelings and those of my respondents. By entering into my own feelings of pain and loss I believe I am afforded a pathway to understanding the experiences of others and the general issue of loss in our culture.

To research this book, I interviewed 60 adults—30 women and 30 men from mostly middle- but also working-class backgrounds—whose mothers had died when these adults were early adolescents, children between 10 and 15 years of age. I chose this age range because at 10 people are likely to have clear memories and still young enough that the child still has significant growing up to do. Also, my own mother had died when I was 13. I found respondents through word of mouth, notices in community centers and largely through advertisements in newspapers in several different cities in the Northeast. The large majority of the mothers of these interviewees had died of cancer or other long-term illnesses; about a third had died suddenly from such diverse causes as a heart attack, a cerebral hemorrhage, complications after surgery or a car crash. Six of these were suicides. The interviewees ranged in age from 20 to 80, with the large majority between 40 and 60 years old. This predominant age is important to note: Most of these adults grew up in the '40s, '50s and early '60s; during the post-war glorification of motherhood, nuclear family, and the home.

A loving mother is so central to our idea of family that it is virtually impossible to have a family without her.



As a sociologist, my perspective on motherloss focused on how the larger social context in which mothers die shapes individuals' personal experiences of their mother's deaths. The key themes in my interviews were repeated across nearly every single interview, regardless of gender, age at death, religion or ethnicity. Among my central findings: Early adolescent motherloss is experienced as a loss of caring; individuals try in diverse ways, throughout their lives, to replace that caring; and individuals and their families go through this experience in relative silence.

Each of these themes reflects larger aspects of American society. In particular, the sense of lost caring is a result of our "separate spheres" ideology, in which women are assigned the role of emotional (and in many ways, physical) caretaker of their families. The silences that surrounded respondents' experiences of their mother's deaths also reflect our general cultural avoidance of death, and the stigmatization of illnesses associated with death.

In talking to 60 people, I was constantly amazed—and reassured—to find that their narratives of motherloss so closely resembled my own. In U.S. middle-class society, the dominant image of the nuclear family is one in which the mother is intensively and exclusively devoted to her children, is the emotional foundation of the family, and does the largely invisible, innumerable tasks that make nuclear family life possible. A nurturing, caring, unconditionally loving mother is so central to our idea of family that it is virtually impossible to have a family without her. Based on my analysis of my interviewees' life stories, and the forces that shape them, I have found that the intensity and exclusivity of motherhood as it is constructed in our society means that children who have lost their mothers feel they no longer have a stable foundation for their lives. A central part of the mother's role is simply "being there" for her children and husband. Therefore, mothers cannot simply be replaced. Although, theoretically, many of the particular tasks a mother does can be taken care of by other people—fathers as well as other women and men—her death undermines her family's ability to maintain the form and functions of the dominant nuclear family model.

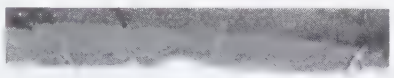
Indeed, so high is the idealized standard for motherhood, even living mothers can rarely live up to our conditioned expectations. While I was working on this study, several friends and acquaintances whose mothers were still alive described themselves to me as "unmothered." Their perceptions of their mother's lack of complete emotional availability to them led them to experience themselves as "growing up motherless." Even people who felt that their mothers were generally good and available to them nevertheless expressed disappointment over the mothering they received: It never met the standards of our society's ideal.

When a mother is lost, there is a confluence and confusion as to who is missed—the ideal mother or the real one. Many of my interviewees described their families prior to their mother's death in less than glowing terms. Mothers might have had nasty tempers, been overly strict disciplinarians, or profligate with the limited family resources. Nevertheless, when interviewees talked about the caring they lost, they turned a blind eye to their mixed emotions, instead echoing our cultural ideals of maternal perfection and unconditional love. Clearly, it is easier to idolize someone who is no longer present to remind you of her human fallibilities.

Our social construction of the image of the institution of

Motherhood is generally an idealized image that few, if any, people can live up to. This idealized image is damning to real women and mothers who must negotiate the competing demands upon their lives. The discrepancy between the idealized version of Mother and the real, live mothers who today struggle to weave together family and work in their lives suggests to me that the "woman question" that first arose with Industrialization has still not been adequately resolved. Even as the majority of women with children work in the paid labor market, the ideology of a woman's place being in the home still reigns supreme, resulting in social and personal strains for women, their families and the larger society.

Given that the nuclear family, with the mother at its center, has been the primary model of family in our society for so long, people often react strongly to deviations from this pattern. Fifty-seven of my 60 respondents emphasized the denial and silences that surrounded their mothers' illnesses and deaths, a silence borne out of our cultural "denial of death" and of the sense of shame produced by a family that "deviates" from the normative nuclear structure. Although attitudes toward death have been changing in recent years, in the middle decades of this century, death stigmatized those who came close to it, especially when it shattered a family's ability to comply with the normative nuclear model. As Rita, a 39-year-old Jewish woman eloquently stated, "I think the shame came from the fact that it was hidden. There was shame that she had cancer and there was shame that she was dying, so that is why I felt the way I did, like there is something wrong with her being sick and dying—that it is something you're ashamed of. And I don't feel good about that now, because it was nothing to be ashamed of, it wasn't her fault. It certainly wasn't my fault."



Death stigmatizes, especially when it shatters a family's ability to comply with the normative nuclear model.

Given our cultural discomfort and avoidance of death, the silences surrounding my respondents' mothers' deaths have generally lasted throughout their lives. These silences took their lost mothers away from them still further, producing a deep disruption in their sense of self and in their abilities to construct a coherent narrative of their lives. Many told me that the interview with me was a welcome chance to talk about a subject they almost never got to discuss; it challenged the social taboos that had made it difficult for them to integrate their experiences of motherloss into their sense of themselves.

Despite these deep cultural taboos, my respondents have nevertheless found intuitive and creative ways to maintain their mothers' symbolic presence in their lives. Some of these forms drew directly upon the religious traditions in which they had been raised, such as the Jewish ritual of annual cemetery visits. Others took more individual approaches, gathering up pieces and strands from various traditions and fashioning their own bricolage. One man told me he sewed a piece of his mother's bridal veil into the yarmulke he wore at his wedding; another woman carried her mother's photo in her bridal bouquet and then placed that same photo in her son's pocket on his bar mitzvah day. A runner told me of the conversations she has with her mother when she runs; others spoke of praying to their late mothers. The ways that my interviewees recreated their mothers' presences through symbols constitute meaningful ways through which they could reestablish embodied relationships with their mothers.

Both their idealizations of their lost mothers and their efforts to maintain her symbolic presence represent some of the ways that individuals hold on to someone whose loss was so painful. These idealizations and practices are a way of normalizing an "abnormal" experience—as if to say, I have a mother, she is still with me, I was loved and am loved and thus worthy of having a good life myself.

It is hard to know how a broader social openness to discussions about death might affect individuals' narratives of motherloss. I know that most of the people I spoke with struggled, during our conversations, to find a language in which to talk about an experience they had clearly understood as taboo. I know that the silences that began with my own mother's illness (cancer, which was not named in our household) continued for my brothers and me long after her death.

Part of the process of coming to terms with motherloss involves moving beyond American silences about death and finding the ways to express feelings, reactions and memories. Articulating—and thus re-experiencing—motherloss helps to weave this disruption into a coherent understanding of ourselves. Writing *Motherloss* represents my attempt to break these silences—personal, professional (the academy generally frowns upon the use of the personal in scholarly research) and cultural—that throughout my respondents' and my lives, have been our typical ways of dealing with motherloss. As we break the long silences and fashion new ways in which to tell our particular life stories, we create alternative narrative frameworks that can help others to articulate their experiences and, perhaps, ultimately lead to wider social change.

Lynn Davidman is Associate Professor of American Civilization, Judaic Studies and Women's Studies at Brown University and author of Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism. Motherloss *is forthcoming from University of California Press.*

The Shame of Having No Mother

by Francine Cournos, M.D.

JONI LEVY LIBERMAN

Francine Cournos was born in 1945. She was the middle of three children in a lower-middle-class family in the South Bronx. Her father died suddenly from an undiagnosed brain tumor when she was three. Her mother died of breast cancer when she was 11. The following passages are taken from her extraordinary new memoir of loss and healing, City of One, *just published by W.W. Norton & Company.*

My mother never said good-bye to me. I stared out the window at her receding figure, arm in arm with her brother, and I thought: I may never see her again. I suspect she knew she was never coming back. I had no name for her condition, but this time was worse than the others. This time she was barely able to breathe.

I am haunted by this parting: she said nothing to me as she walked away. No "I love you," no "I'm sorry," no reassurances that she was happy to care for us despite her debilitating illness, no instructions for what I was to do without her. Maybe I wanted something impossible to give to an eleven-year-old, something that would sustain me for a lifetime, making up for all I would miss. Maybe she was too sick to say good-bye. Maybe she was too upset to confront the end. I will never know nor will I ever stop wondering.

Mine is an account of loss and reconnection that begins with my earliest memories and ends in the present. I have recorded the facts just as I remember them, using written documentation whenever it was available. It is also, to be sure, a subjective account, told from an internal perspective, first that of a child, later that of a young woman and a physician practicing internal medicine, and finally that of a psychiatrist.

School

Sixth grade had just started, and I was huddled with my five classmates on a street corner, catching up from our summer break. I was ashamed to tell them, but I finally got up the courage. My mother died. One week ago. That's all I said. My friends looked ill at ease, shifting from one foot to another, saying nothing. I felt bad for them. Well, at least I had gotten it over with. Still, I was left thinking: Would they now think less of me? Children without parents are bad: they lost them—killed them—drove them away. I hated myself—hated my body—hated how I looked. My yellow polo shirt clung to my body, revealing my tiny breasts. Shame on me for letting them show. I folded my arms across my chest to hide them.

The Unveiling

We arrived. I put my pretty yellow daffodils on the grave. Everyone else picked ugly gray pebbles and put them on the top of the headstone, the Jewish way. Ugly rocks. I was determined not to cry, to show them I was grown up. When the tears started to come, I took my [younger] sister by the

hand and we walked away from the grave site. We cried together where we could not be seen. "We can't cry in front of anyone else," I instructed my sister. Alexis had faith in the rules I'd made up for us. Afterward, I overheard the adults explaining to one another that Francine and Alexis hadn't cried because they just didn't understand. The adults around us, intellectually or emotionally incapable of imagining the intensity of our pain, chose to imagine that we suffered none. Still, I was pleased. I was where a dutiful daughter belonged, at the unveiling of my mother's headstone marking the first anniversary of her death, and I felt that I had, at least in some way or to some degree, made up for missing her funeral.

Some Solace

One day, when I felt particularly lonely, I climbed into the double bed where Mom used to sleep and imagined her returning. I'd throw my arms around her and cry in bittersweet happiness. I absentmindedly reached down and touched myself. It felt nice, so I continued, and then an amazing sensation I'd never had before shook my entire body. In an instant my mind turned from thinking about Mom to thinking about having sex with a man someday. I was amazed by my discovery. Now I had my own way of making myself feel better whenever I wanted to, which turned out to be quite often. If at night I felt sad, or if I was upset about something, or if I couldn't fall asleep, or even if there was no real reason at all, I indulged in this private pleasure and didn't feel as bad about having to live without my mom. Maybe someday I'd have a man and children of my own, and then I could be part of a normal family again. To this day, I believe that my ever-present sexual drive was a powerful life force that helped save me, and I'm grateful for it. ... [It] allowed me to recognize how much I still longed to be close to other people.

My ever-present sexual drive was a powerful life force that helped save me.

Foster Care

The woman spoke. Alexis and I would be moving to a foster home, she informed us, to live with a family that had not yet been selected. As the words sank in, rage took over. "I'll jump off the Empire State Building," I shouted, striving for the most dramatic possible statement, one that would really have an effect. If I threatened something outrageous enough, they surely wouldn't go through with this. But they just humored me. The unfamiliar woman described the virtues of a new home, but I had stopped listening. I could barely distinguish between the fury I felt toward my relatives and the rage I turned on myself for being so helpless. "You can't do this to me, you can't give me away if I don't want to leave." I wished I really could jump off the Empire State Building, but if I was to be loyal to my mother, I would stay in control no matter what anyone did to me or how tempted I was by my own anger. I took my mother's stoicism and self-control [during her illness] as the model, and did my best never to deviate. ...

Just as the psychoanalytic theories posit, my mourning, unlike that of an adult, consisted of holding on to my dead mother even more tightly than in life, rather than moving further away from her. When I realized there would be no acceptable substitute, I redoubled my efforts to stay conscious of Mom, to re-create her, to use her in place of any living relationship. It was much less frightening than facing just how alone I really was.

A New "Mother" at Adolescence

I was faced with a task not in the ordinary developmental sequence of events—to connect at just the moment it feels more important to disconnect. We [Cournos and her foster mother] had no common history to fall back on—we hadn't known each other when I was little, and needy in a very different way. Orphaned adolescents have a terrible dilemma: they have a developmental need to break away, but their parents have beaten them to the punch. Continued adult involvement in my life was essential, and yet it was the wrong time to begin again.

Adulthood, On the Couch

I was terrified by my inner life, which of course was to be the focus of our conversation. The subject of my mother was the most fearful of all. My resistance could be summarized as follows:

"You're angry with your mother."

"No I'm not."

"You idealize her."

"No I don't"

"You're angry at me, too."

"No I'm not. And you're perfect. Just like her."

After all, as long as you're going to have an imaginary mother, why not make her a perfect mother and have your perfect feelings for her? If I no longer had to concern myself with having a real live mother, if I had to invent one, why would I invent a flawed one?

Another advantage to my delusion: when I became a mother myself, I would know just what to do, because I would be just like my own mother. It never crossed my mind that emulating my mother would mean feeling convinced that I was ill and dying, about to the desert the child I so desperately wanted to raise. ■

Francine Cournos is a professor of clinical psychology at Columbia University.

Mothering Without a Map

A Second-Generation Story

by Karen Paul-Stern

JONI LEVY LIBERMAN

When I first heard about the publication of Hope Edelman's groundbreaking book, *Motherless Daughters,* I raced out to buy it. When I told my mother that I was reading it, her reaction was swift and visceral—"You are NOT a motherless daughter!" she screamed. I tried to explain that I felt I was—my mother had walked out when I was 16 years old. She was not an active part of my life again until I graduated from college. I didn't understand until years later, when I became a mother myself, that what I really was searching for in Edelman's book was some insight into my mother's life, which had taken a tragic turn at a young age.

My mother's father died when she was two, and her mother died when she was 13. This makes me the second generation of a motherless daughter; I grew up with a mother who essentially had no road map for mothering. Had even one of her parents lived to see her to adulthood, I am sure she would have been a very different parent.

"Second generation"—a loaded phrase. In the Jewish world, it means having parents who were survivors of the Holocaust. For me, it means bearing the imprint of a mother who wanted to be a mother but, somewhere along the way, could no longer sum up the emotional energy to fulfill her obligations and desires. When my parents divorced, my mother was the one who moved out, not only of our house, but essentially of our lives for a number of years.

My mother's absence from my life in my later teenage years and early adulthood was devastating for me. But even before that time, I felt her absence. She was so unlike the other mothers I knew. She was so proud of marching to the beat of her own drummer, yet at the same time was (and is) incredibly fearful. She would not let me sleep with a pillow until I was five years old, afraid that I would suffocate. She would not watch me learn how to ride my bike without the training wheels, afraid I would hurt myself. She herself has never learned how to ride a bike or drive a car. She feels so unsafe in the world. And while I have successfully navigated my way to adulthood and even parenthood, my own path has been strewn with fear and trepidation, which I work daily to overcome.

I was raised on a confusing combination of early-1970s feminism and the quixotic lives of The Brady Bunch. As a result, I craved both a strong female role model, a working mom outside the home, as well as a mother who ran a "real" home. While my mother always had a career outside the home, she completely lacked the domestic touch. She herself had had no guides, and, by the time I was 16 and beginning to explore my "femaleness," my own mother was gone. I had no one from whom to learn how to do the girl things I so craved. It wasn't until college, when I met the friend I think of as my "girlfriend mentor," that I learned most of what I know about how to dress, how to apply makeup, how to buy a good cantaloupe, the difference between shetland and cashmere, how to flirt, how to cook. I learned about my body from books and about sex mostly from a precocity in high school that sent me reeling into situations I should not have encoun-

continued on page 45

Conservative Judaism's Unfinished Business

For 30 years Mindell Kaplan was the rabbi's wife. Rabbi Louis Kaplan was the head of a mid-size Conservative synagogue in Pennsylvania. He and Mindell were always outspoken about the need to eliminate women's inferior status in Judaism. But about a decade ago, Mindell came to believe that women would not achieve equality within the Conservative movement without a real rethinking of the movement's approach to Jewish law.

"I was sort of lucky," she told LILITH, "because no one really asked me what I thought of about halakha *[Jewish law]. If you're the wife of a rabbi of a congregation, you can't run around saying those things."*

HARRIET FINCK

Now, however, her husband has retired, and she's taken the opportunity to look at Conservative Judaism in a more public way. The following essay grew out of a dvar Torah *she presented in her community. It represents years of frustration—and a fresh look at two brand new publications of the Conservative movement: the movement's newly revised* Sim Shalom *prayer book (its standard text), and its updated rabbi's manual,* Moreh Derekh, *intended to guide rabbis through the liturgical needs of every life-cycle event.*

The Rabbi's Manual has been hailed in the press for embracing feminist innovations. "Feminism and spirituality are gaining ground in the Conservative movement's first revision of its rabbi's manual in 33 years," announced the Forward newspaper. The paper noted the addition of ceremonies for such life-cycle events as miscarriage, abortion, birth of a handicapped child, retirement, and sending children away to camp. Earlier in the year, in a similar vein, The Jewish Week of New York announced a "Radical Shift Toward Gender Sensitive Siddur" in the new Sim Shalom *prayer book. (What the papers didn't note was that the English translations were much more gender-sensitive than the Hebrew texts.)*

While these innovations surely will enrich some aspects of the lives of Jewish women, Mindell Kaplan tries to imagine what a truly woman-welcoming Conservative movement might look like.

BY MINDELL KAPLAN
(WITH RESPONSA FROM THE RABBIS)

JUST AS JEWS HAVE WORKED FOR EQUAL RIGHTS FOR OTHER GROUPS...

Now that there's a new prayer book and guide for Conservative rabbis, it is time for a *din v'cheshbon*, an accounting, of the changes since the landmark decisions permitting women to be called to the Torah (1955), permitting women's inclusion in the *minyan* (1973) and ordaining them as rabbis (1983). These public victories mask other *halakhic* unfinished business. Much more remains to be done.

Halakhic decisions for the Conservative movement are made by the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly. The Law Committee has issued many decisions that affected the role of women, the majority of them in the 1970s and 1980s. Most decisions dealt with rituals. Are women permitted to perform one or another of the rituals traditionally performed by men? Even when the answer was yes, the fact that the question had to be asked was itself demeaning to women.

Even today, however, as women hold pulpits, the Conservative movement is still asking, "What is permissible to women?" For the most part, the answers given are not that women *should* participate, but that they *may* do so. This attitude simply perpetuates the feeling of many women that the public rituals and sancta of Judaism don't really belong to them. This is the most troubling element of Conservative Judaism's unfinished business. A few areas still cause me to cringe.

JEWISH MEN SHOULD ALSO WORK FOR EQUALITY OF JEWISH WOMEN.

There are those who say...

On Birkat Hamazon: "Rabbi Blumenthal's 1974 recommendation of '*Gevirotai verabotai nevarekh...*' [Ladies and gentlemen, let us praise] is a fine way to acknowledge the participation of both men and women in thanking God for a meal. But it was only a recommendation. The editors preferred the alternative *haverei,* or *my friends,* both for its gender neutrality and for its warmth."

—Rabbi Perry Raphael Rank, *co-editor, Rabbi's Manual*

A Matter of Perspective: "No sensible person denies the importance of the matriarchs" but to shoehorn them into the *Amidah* betrays the literary and biblical structure of the classic text.

—Rabbi Jules Harlow, *editor of the previous edition of the Sim Shalom, as expressed by The Jewish Week*

On the Inclusion of Matriarchs: Rabbi Leonard Cahan explains that there are two Conservative positions on the inclusion of the matriarchs in the *Amidah:* "One, that including the matriarchs is halakhically acceptable; and two, that including the matriarchs is not acceptable." In the new prayer book, for the first time in the Conservative movement, the Sim Shalom *Amidah* has an "A" page, with the traditional form, and a "B" page immediately following that includes a parenthetical headline "(With Matriarch)."

"I can't for the life of me imagine why the matriarch [version] being the 'B' page is seen as alternative and dismissive," comments Rabbi Cahan. "There is no justification that anyone could see that [attitude] in the book, because it doesn't exist." Why, Rabbi Cahan asks rhetorically, couldn't one argue that the "A" page is the alternative?

—Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan, *chair of the editorial committee,* Sim Shalom

Our Language for Prayer

As long ago as 1974, Rabbi Aaron Blumenthal, speaking to the Law Committee, objected to the traditional *Zimun,* the invitation to recite the Grace after Meals. It reads: "*Rabbotai nevarekh*" (Gentlemen, let us praise). He urged that the wording be changed to "*Gevirotai verabbotai nevarekh*" (Ladies and gentlemen, let us praise). Though he didn't say so explicitly, I'm sure he also would have supported changing a later sentence to "*Bereshut gevirotai verabbotai,*" (With your permission, ladies and gentlemen). He saw this as a matter of simple courtesy to the women present.

Even a quarter century later, in the brand new Rabbi's Manual, the movement is unable to muster this level of courtesy. As printed, the invitation to pray now reads with the option: "*Rabbotai/Haverei*" (Gentlemen/Friends.) Which really raises the question: If we can change the text to say "Friends," why not create a version that explicitly includes women? After all, even at a recent conference of Orthodox feminists, the grace after meals offered the "*Gevirotai*" (Ladies, or Women) option to be said "when three or more women have eaten alone or together with one or two men."

There are also questions about the new Sim Shalom prayer book issued by the Rabbinical Assembly in 1998. The editors of the new prayer book have kindly added the matriarchs to the list of patriarchs—but only in the first paragraph of the *Amidah,* the central prayer of the Hebrew liturgy. They should have included our foremothers in the rest of the *siddur* as well. We invoke the God of the patriarchs because the Torah describes God as making His Covenant with these men—women being included only as their adjuncts. By including the matriarchs, we are saying that, however the covenant was arrived at, it now must be redefined to include us all. This would make the Sim Shalom gender-sensitive in a meaningful way.

Life's Passages

THE NEW BABY. When a boy is born, he is inducted into *Brit Avraham,* the covenant of Abraham. Since women were only peripheral members of the covenant, there was no equivalent ceremony for girls.

In the last few years, new ceremonies have been developed to welcome the birth of a girl. Sometimes this ceremony is called a "*simchat bat,*" marking the "joy of a girl." More commonly, it is called a baby-naming, a term that in no way indicates the true significance of welcoming a new member into the Jewish community. The new Rabbi's Manual includes a traditional naming ceremony calling forth for the girl the blessings of Torah, marriage and good deeds. It also includes what it calls the "innovative ritual," in which the girl's learning of Torah is invoked at greater length. However, the baby girl is nowhere inducted—as she is in the Reform movement—into the covenant of all of Israel, the *brit Yisrael.* This is something that parents should demand for their daughters.

ARE OUR CURRENT RITUALS GOOD ENOUGH FOR NEWBORN GIRLS?

On Welcoming a Girl: "The editors' original title for the welcoming ceremonies for girls was *Brit Banot,* or the Covenant of Girls. The title was rejected by the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards. The rejection was twofold. First, girls are automatically a part of the covenant. Boys are not. Therefore, any suggestion that a girl must be brought into the covenant is in error. Secondly, because entry into the *brit* is so closely associated with circumcision, the CJLS [the Law Committee] did not want to give any credence to the need for a parallel rite of circumcision for girls. There is no place for female genital mutilation in Judaism. At any rate, without invoking the term *brit,* we pray that girls enjoy the blessings of Torah, *huppah* [wedding canopy], and *ma'asim tovim* [good deeds], which is language identical to that as found in the prayers welcoming boys into the *brit.*"

—Rabbi Rank

There are those who say...

On the Wedding Contract: "The *ketubah* printed in *Moreh Derekh* sports more than a minor change. It is a revision of the *ketubah* that took place in 1987. Not only does it call for the bride's active participation in creating a home filled with love, harmony, and peace, etc., but it offers the rabbi options for referring to the bride without reference to her marital status (i.e., virgin, divorcee, widow, etc.), rendering her an individual in her own right."

—Rabbi Rank

THE KETUBAH. Turning to marriage and divorce, we find that both ceremonies are rituals with symbolic value only. The issues of substance in both areas are governed by the civil courts, so the symbolism is of supreme importance.

It is surely no accident that the *ketubah* is hardly ever printed with an accurate English translation of the Aramaic. If it were, it would indicate the acquisitive nature of the traditional text, stating (in the groom's voice): "I obligate myself to give you the sum of 200 *zuzim* as the purchase price of your virginity." The Reform movement has created a new *ketubah*, in which the bride and groom express a mutual commitment to each other, with identical Hebrew and English texts. The texts do not mention the monetary value of the bride or any other financial arrangements.

Unfortunately, many Conservative rabbis want to preserve rituals in their traditional forms, even if their meanings are now repugnant to us. In the new Rabbi's Manual, a very small change was made, so the rabbi has an option: the

DO WE HAVE TO MENTION THE BRIDE'S VIRGINITY?

SEMINARY REMOVES HIGHEST-RANKING WOMAN

At a meeting in March that surprised and upset rabbinical students at the Conservative Movement's Jewish Theological Seminary, the chancellor announced that Dr. Anne Lapidus Lerner would end her six-year tenure as vice chancellor. "I think she was wonderful in the position," commented Francine Klagsbrun, a LILITH board member who for a decade was head of the Board of Overseers of the Seminary Library and who is slated to receive an honorary degree from the school. "I think it is a loss for the Seminary."

Though Lerner is returning to full-time teaching and scholarship, students were outraged. As the highest-ranking woman at the Seminary, Lerner had come to represent women's power at an institution that is not always considered woman-friendly. Creator and director of the master's program in women's studies, and an unofficial mentor to many women at the school, she had come to be seen a powerful advocate for women's issues. Her removal "diminishes the position that women seem to have there," says Klagsbrun.

"The position of vice chancellor made me a symbol which for many represented the contributions that women could now make to Judaism," Lerner told LILITH. "What message is being sent by removing me from this position?"

Students at the school, the flagship educational institution of Conservative Judaism and a training ground for its rabbis and scholars, have jumped to Lerner's defense. They fear that the vice chancellor may have lost her position because, in supporting women at JTS, she had stepped on important toes.

Amanda Brodie, a fourth-year rabbinical student, wrote to Chancellor Ismar Schorsch: "She gave me the feeling that women were not only welcome at J.T.S, but also could rise to positions where they could impact upon what was happening in the Movement... [The] message seems to be that that is not the case."

Brodie, who said the demotion "sends an awkward message when the Conservative movement is supposed to be all rah-rah egalitarian," also wrote to Schorsch her concern that the move might be "partly because of Dr. Lerner's involvement in [women's issues] and the establishment of the women's center at J.T.S."

Heather Altman, formerly president of the Rabbinical School Student Organization, said Lerner was the only faculty member at the Seminary who had ever invited her for Shabbat, "which is a whole different type of leadership and a kind of leadership that we need."

"I remember the buzz when it was announced that she would become a vice-chancellor," commented Rabbi Andi Merow, who completed her undergraduate studies at JTS in 1992 and was ordained in 1997. Lerner was her undergraduate dean. "It was momentous for many of us to be able to say, finally, JTS has a female vice chancellor. And now we return to a time with no women as vice-chancellors and no women in the leadership of the Rabbinical School. *Eikh naflu,* how we have fallen. ... I make these comments," added Merow "out of love and concern for the school and my teachers."

Chancellor Schorsch told LILITH that "the change has nothing to do with diminishing the role of women at the Seminary. The change has everything to do with increasing the efficiency of the Seminary." While he said he could understand women students' displeasure at this change, he also believes "some of the anger is symbolic instead of substantive.... The response is in part political."

Schorsch, however, said he did not believe the students' displeasure was symbolic of a problem in the Seminary's climate vis-a-vis women. "Numbers are concrete," he said, naming a number of women in positions of power at the Seminary. "Climate is elusive." And he said there would be no formal response to the student anger. "We will not make more of it than it is."

When asked if the atmosphere would feel more male without Lerner in the vice chancellor's chair, Brodie commented: "The Seminary is not a particularly woman-friendly place to begin with, so the question of how it will be negatively impacted [by Lerner's demotion] is hard to answer." Altman concurred: "That's a scary question. I don't know how it could feel *more* male."

—Sarah Blustain

There are those who say...

On Consecration of the Bride: "*Kiddushin* is the Hebrew term for engagement, which in Jewish terms is more critical than marriage. As most women agree, it's getting the guy to make a commitment that is so difficult. But *kiddushin* is not acquisition. The groom does not say, 'I own you.' The groom says, 'You are consecrated to me...,' that is to say, 'You are special for me...' We chose other language for the bride to convey the same message to the groom, 'You are special to me....' There was no need for any slavish parallelism here. The wedding ceremony is a combination of law and poetry."

—Rabbi Rank

rabbi can either use the traditional 200-*zuzim*-for-virginity language, or he can simply use the word *ketubah* instead of virginity. The English can be misleading because it never translates "virginity" nor the phrase "purchase price." So of course, a couple who does not know Aramaic or Hebrew will not know which version they are signing.

In hewing to this traditional line, the Conservative movement ignores the fact that rituals are important precisely because of the values they express. In 1978, during a Law Committee discussion about the *ketubah*, one rabbi actually argued:

> *We cannot change the text of the* Ketubah. *It must be maintained for its own value. We cannot deny that the entire ceremony as well as the text of the* Ketubah *are sexist. The marriage might be mutual but the ceremony of marriage is not.*

This attitude is outrageous! It is precisely the people who are most devoted to *halakhah* who should be concerned with devising rituals that embody the highest moral standards of our time. Here, the Conservative rabbis should follow the lead of their Reform counterparts.

THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY. The new Rabbi's Manual also still provides a marriage ceremony that symbolizes a one-sided acquisition of the bride by the groom, not a concept of marriage to be proud of.

In this ceremony, the groom offers a declaration that "consecrates" the bride to him. Most people are thrilled at this mention of consecration. What they don't realize is that the groom is really establishing his claim to the bride, setting her aside for himself exclusively, just as vessels "consecrated" to the Temple were used only in the Temple.

When the question was raised in 1974 of the bride "consecrating" the groom in return, the Law Committee ruled: "A rabbi may officiate at a double ring ceremony ... but under no circumstances may [the bride] say, '*Harei atah mekudash li*'" (Behold you [the groom] are consecrated to me).

At my own wedding in 1952, I insisted on reciting the same formula as the groom. After a long, bitter argument, our liberal Conservative rabbi finally yielded, telling me, "Okay, you can make the same declaration, but I have to tell you it won't mean anything."

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT RIPPING UP YOUR KETUBAH?

Forty-six years later, nothing has really changed. Many rabbis do "allow" the bride to recite the consecration formula. They can permit this statement, however, only as an expression of the rabbi's opinion and not as a binding vow. As such, it only gives the bride the illusion of equality. Furthermore, should the marriage end in divorce, these same rabbis would still require a *get*, a bill of Jewish divorce, which can now be authorized only by the husband.

In the Reform ceremony the bride and groom do make identical declarations to each other "to emphasize," explains their rabbi's manual, that both husband and wife are now 'set aside' for each other, in full equality." To change all this in the Conservative movement would require an official statement that the two identical declarations are necessary to establish the marriage. But, of course, the rabbis tell us that such a change would be contrary to *halakhah*. In order to effect change, couples should demand an egalitarian marriage.

DIVORCE. If the wedding ceremony is problematical, the divorce is even worse. The essential clause of the *get*, the traditional Jewish bill of divorce that is still used by the Conservative movement, is a statement by the husband that he and his one-time bride are no longer married and that she is free to remarry. Regardless

On a Jewish ERA: "I have long been an advocate of egalitarianism in Judaism. But the real question is not whether the community advocates it, it's whether or not women embrace it. I have been a rabbi for 18 years now and within the past five years, I have seen more women adamantly opposed to wearing *kippah*, *tallit*, and *tefillin*. I have also had, within the past year or two, many more requests from brides to walk around the groom, a ritual that had almost been treated with disdain only five years ago. I don't think that women are rejecting egalitarian Judaism per se. I think they are searching for and discovering who they are Jewishly, without accepting any preconceived notions about the definition of full Jewish womanhood. What does it mean to be fully Jewish, whether one is a woman or a man? Good question."

—Rabbi Rank

On Divorce: "In a divorce proceeding, the woman is not necessarily passive and not necessarily silent. It is interesting to note that the *get* process is completed not with the husband writing a *get*, but with the wife accepting the *get*."

—Rabbi Rank

of the real reason for the divorce—even if in reality the wife is the partner demanding the split—the *get* includes this statement by the husband: "I release, set free, and put aside you, my wife." In a mirror image of the wedding ceremony he adds, "*Harei at muteret l'khol adam*," behold you are permitted to all men. The symmetry here is perfect. In each case, the husband does the prohibiting and permitting, while the wife remains silent and passive—all in accordance with *halakhah*. This is insulting even when the husband is cooperating fully in the divorce!

In a talk in Philadelphia a few years ago, Rabbi Mayer Rabinowitz, a member of the Law Committee and a teacher of Talmud, spoke adamantly against an egalitarian *get*. He revealed that when a member of the Law Committee once proposed such a *get*, he received exactly one vote—his own.

A Call to Action

If we take Judaism seriously, we must also take seriously its claim to be a source of morality and of religious fulfillment for all Jews, men and women. This is not only a women's issue. Just as Jews have worked for equal rights for other groups, Jewish men should also be willing to work for equality of Jewish women. Equality cannot be extended as a favor; it must be recognized as a right.

In 1984, Rabbi Phillip Sigal, a member of the Law Committee, proposed a *takkanah*, a rabbinic directive that has the force of law, on women's equality in the Conservative movement. Though never enacted, this visionary *takkanah* could be the rallying point for feminists in our movement today:

> *The preferred path for the Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Jewish Law and Standards in this era would be to issue a comprehensive resolution, a* takkanah *that would serve as a* halakhic *ERA. This would state that women are to be considered equal with men in all aspects of Judaic religious life, that no prior statement of the Torah, rabbinic literature, medieval or modern commentaries and compilations, whether* aggadic *or* halakhic, *should be construed in any manner as valid to prejudice this equality.*

CAN THE MOVEMENT CLAIM TO BE A SOURCE OF MORALITY WHEN IT HAS NOT GRANTED WOMEN EQUALITY?

"My problem as a 'traditional' feminist"

I am writing this review from a dual perspective, as a feminist and as an active user of the new *Siddur* (prayer book) *Va'ani Tefillati* in a Masorti (Conservative) congregation in Israel. To complicate issues, I am also married to the chairperson of the committee of the Rabbinical Assembly of Israel that formulated the [Israeli] *siddur*, Rabbi Michael Graetz. Although I have been privy to the process, I will relate primarily to the product, to which I and any other user have access on a daily basis.

The *siddur* has taken the direction of including women and recognizing their contributions to Jewish life and history, but it has done so in a manner that clearly expresses the dispute around this position and the compromises that were made. For example, the word *ve-imoteinu* ("and our foremothers"), wherever it appears next to *avoteinu* in the obligatory prayers (and it does not always appear), is placed in brackets, making it evident that this is merely an optional alternative to the male norm. For many of us, this amounts to a bone thrown to the starving.

The inclusion of women in religious life, on the other hand, is much less in dispute, as exemplified by the ceremony for the birth of a daughter (*Zeved habat*), the assignment of significant roles to women in the circumcision ceremony, the revision of the customary prayer for rain to mention both forefathers and foremothers, and the equivalent prayers for *bnot* and *bnei mitzvah*. The picture used to show the correct placement of the head phylactery is of a woman. And despite the controversy about the insertion of *imahot* in the central *Amidah* prayer, *the imahot* are inserted before the *avot* in the Grace after Meals.

Despite these very important efforts to include women more thoroughly in the *siddur*, I found it very disturbing to discover in the daily *Amidah* a newly created passage for *Yom Hashoah* (the Memorial Day for the Holocaust) in which no attempt at inclusivity is made. Thus, we read "our fathers" (no *imoteinu* this time) and *Zaken ve-na'ar* ("old and young," in the masculine). On the other hand, the very moving *Seder Yom Hashoah* included elsewhere in the *siddur* relates to women's experiences as well.

It is also serious to me, as a feminist, that the God-language of the *siddur* is exclusively male. Tikva Frymer-Kensky has pointed out the problem:

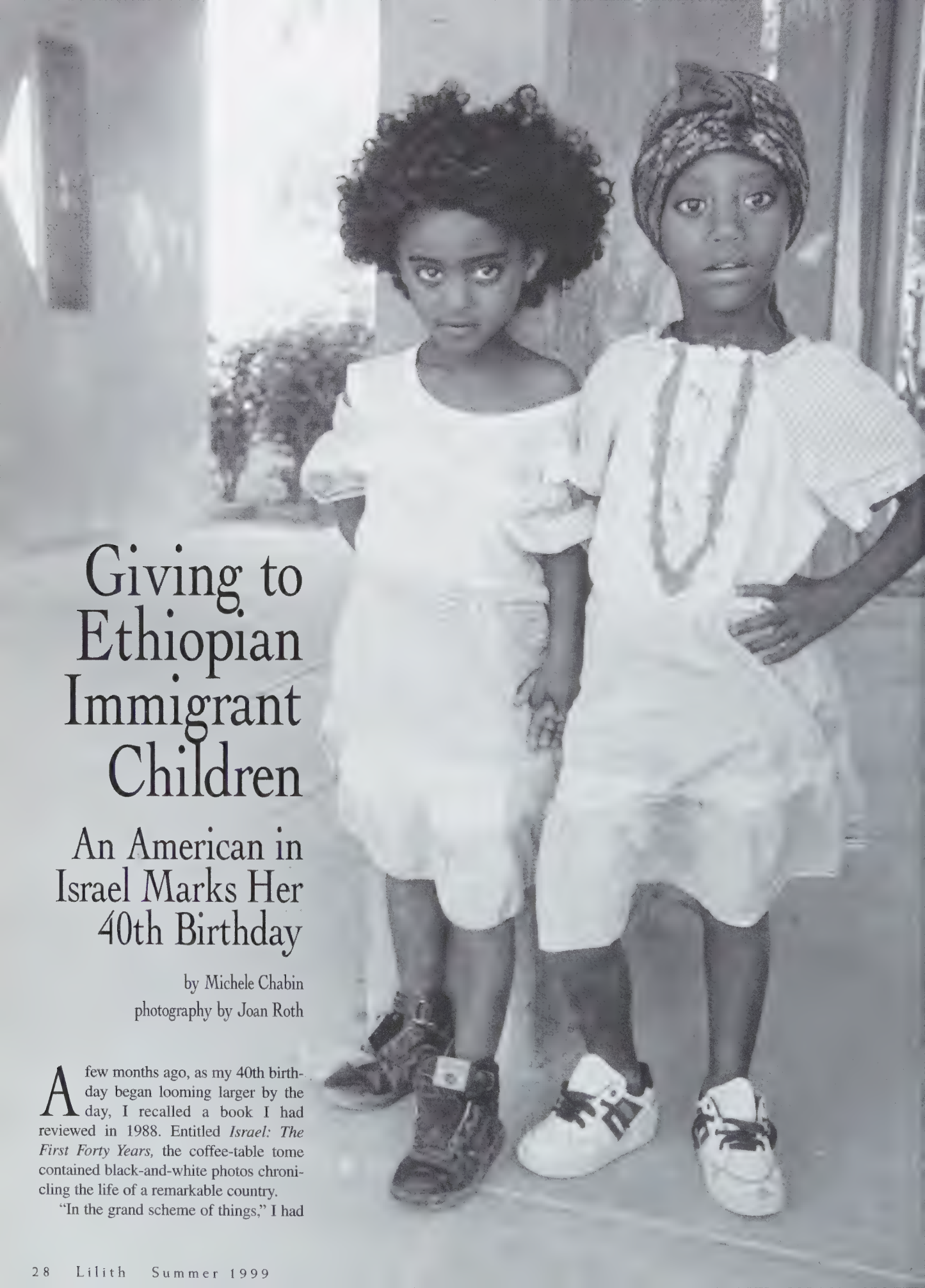
> The God of Biblical Israel is grammatically male: all the verbal forms, adjectives and pronouns are masculine. God in the Bible is also sociologically male: the husband, the father, the king. ... This cumulative impact of male-centered language and imagery is profoundly alienating to women.

She thus states for me the problem that I have as a "traditional" feminist. On the one hand, I recognize the abusive potential of an all-powerful God. On the other, if I toss out many of the traditional images, I lose a lot of the beauty—melodies to words I know, images, associations—that are part of the Jewish tradition that I grew up with. I am often in a state of cognitive dissonance when I pray.

Cognitive dissonance may help me to understand why I put up with the old imagery, but, as Frymer-Kensky eloquently points out, there is no going back once we see the light. Once we engage in de-gendering, incorporating feminine forms for God, we can either leave the fold or remain and be complicit.

—Naomi Graetz

The above is adapted from a much longer review of the siddur in the Israeli, English-language feminist magazine Nashim.



Giving to Ethiopian Immigrant Children

An American in Israel Marks Her 40th Birthday

by Michele Chabin
photography by Joan Roth

A few months ago, as my 40th birthday began looming larger by the day, I recalled a book I had reviewed in 1988. Entitled *Israel: The First Forty Years,* the coffee-table tome contained black-and-white photos chronicling the life of a remarkable country.

"In the grand scheme of things," I had

written, "40 years is little more than an historical pit stop. But for the people who've lived it, 40 years can be an eternity—whether it has been spent wandering in the desert or building a nation."

Eleven years later, the belief that 40 is an important milestone both personally and Jewishly still resonates with me. This feeling was reinforced by my gynecologist, who in January, a month before my birthday, intoned, "after 40 it's all downhill fertility-wise. I don't care whether you're single or married, just get pregnant!" I went home and wept.

To rouse myself from the doldrums, I recalled the Biblical "Exodus" story, which I have loved since childhood. When I was young I imagined myself trekking through the desert for 40 arduous, spiritually cleansing years on the way to the Promised Land.

These were some of my disjointed musings as I considered how to mark my 40th birthday. Part of me wanted to fly to Europe and escape the day entirely; the single woman part of me wanted to register at Macy's, to receive all those great dishes and toaster ovens engaged women believe is their birthright; and a very small part of me remembered an article I'd seen, about a rich young man who'd thrown a big charity ball for his birthday. Thanks to his efforts and his friends' deep pockets, they'd raised enough money to feed thousands of poor people.

Too poor myself to fly to Europe and too embarrassed to register at Macy's, I chose the third option, though at a discount. Unable to give a great deal of money to charity on my salary, and knowing that my friends are equally strapped, I decided to organize a modest fund-raiser on behalf of new immigrant children.

While researching an article on Ethiopian immigrants last fall, I visited the Givat Hamatos trailer-home park on the outskirts of Jerusalem. There, I saw two- and three-year-olds playing with pieces of broken glass and rusted metal. When I entered the tiny trailers, I learned that most of the park's 400 Ethiopian and Russian children don't have a single doll or ball to play with. Almost three out of four Ethiopian children in Israel live below the poverty line.

Later, when I informed a few friends

"Too poor to fly to Europe, too embarrassed to register at Macy's, I chose a third option."

Those wishing to help immigrant children can make a tax-deductible contribution to: Friends of the Jerusalem Post Toy Fund/Givat Hamatos, 401 North Wabash, Suite 521, Chicago, IL 60611. Indicate that the money is earmarked for the new immigrant kids at Givat Hamatos.

that I intended to organize a musical evening on my birthday to purchase some toys for the kids, the effusive reactions made me squirm. My family rabbi once said that the truest form of *tzedakah* is that which is given anonymously. So I began telling others about the fund-raiser, but withheld the part about my birthday.

The evening itself cost $250, for the rental of a lovely coffee-house and providing some refreshments. Upon hearing of the event, my parents asked if they could split the cost, in honor of my beloved grandfather's *yahrzeit*. Three musician friends and two talented but complete strangers donated their services for a rousing night of klezmer, pop and folk. The Jerusalem Post Toy Fund graciously agreed to issue receipts and to help me purchase the toys at a discount, or to present parents with toy-store vouchers.

We raised $500—not nearly enough, but not bad by Jerusalem standards.

If I had it to do over again, I would have worked harder to publicize the event, and would have employed more guilt in recruiting funds. Only 40 people came, when we could easily have accommodated 80.

Still, I'm pleased that I nixed Macy's in favor of the fundraiser. Thanks to the concert, the coffeehouse manager has decided to throw another evening on behalf of the children, and several people who could not attend have sent checks to the Toy Fund. During some future speaking engagements in the States I plan to make a pitch for more money. My goal is to raise $4,000 by summertime.

As I told my friends that evening in February, my first 40 years of wanderings were pretty self-centered. During the next 40 years I hope to give something back to the community that has so nurtured me. This modest fundraiser was my first, tentative step. ■

Michele Chabin moved from New York's Greenwich Village to Jerusalem 11 years ago. A reporter for USA Today, The New York Jewish Week and the National Catholic Register, she has twice won first-prize Rockower Awards in the field of International Reporting.

My Perfect Family: Two Moms

By Daniel Belasco

Sandy, my mother's companion of 14 years, says she knew I understood her relationship with Mom when I was 10. Mom, Sandy, my sister Judith and I were in the car and a radio DJ announced that the grand prize for the station's contest was a romantic getaway to Hawaii. From the back seat, I asked if that meant that if Mom won, then she would take Sandy and have to buy tickets for Judith and me.

Because Sandy is a rabbi, I've met enough other lesbian Jewish clerics to give me an unusual sensibility. For years when I was a child, I thought that all women rabbis and cantors were lesbians. Mom and Sandy (or Rebbe, as I call her) exposed me to so many other Jewish gays and lesbians who seemed comfortable with their lives that it was easy for me to consider being gay or lesbian as a stable and legitimate identity. Their casualness belied all the traumatic coming-out stories that typify the mainstream media's representation of queer identity, though I only later understood that they shielded Judith and me from their conflicts to help make our lives seem as normal as possible.

As a boy, I was uncomfortable being seen in public with two grown women.

Until I was about 20, my acceptance and understanding of Mom's sexuality was as passive and unconscious as my consideration of my own Jewish and straight identities. Over the years, my friends have asked me questions about my mother, and they were surprised that I was often unable to answer them. I've never discussed the intimate details of Mom's and Rebbe's lives. In fact, up until the time I wrote this essay, I never asked Mom when she knew that she was a lesbian, and she never told me. This crucial experience was not a part of our family's narrative: We were too busy celebrating the present to consider the past. At the time, I liked to joke that we were the lesbian Waltons. My reticence obscured the complexity of my family so that only when issues of continuity and sexuality intersected in my own life did I begin to actively consider how much work had gone into supporting what appeared as such a casual identity. And only when Mom and Sandy challenged me to live up to their conception of a Jewish life was I forced to consider what living a Jewish life really means.

My first family fissioned into two when my parents divorced and my mother came out. I was eight and Judith five. Struggling to keep our lives at an equilibrium, my parents decided to live near one another and to maintain joint custody. Within a few years, my father remarried and my mother began her relationship with Sandy. Jude and I schlepped back and forth between our lesbian family and our straight family, spending Monday to Thursday with Mom and Friday to Sunday with Dad. My time with Mom and Rebbe was only one half of my bipartite life and I could forget about my lesbian family from when Dad fetched us Thursday nights until Mom retrieved us from school Monday afternoons.

Mom, Rebbe, Jude and I were secure in the validity of our family, but we rarely spoke about the difficulties of two lesbians trying to have a normal life in the suburbs. Mom told us about the times she was excluded from the community almost as if they happened to someone else. Some friends distanced themselves from her, she was never invited to PTA activities, and every year had to call the school to put her name back on the regular mailing list, but these were her problems, not ours. Any difficulty that I had with my family—say, my early misplaced discomfort with being seen in public with two grown women—was overshadowed by the fact that Judith and I remained the central focus and were never expected to concern ourselves with our parents' happiness.

The summer before I entered the sixth grade, my mother and Sandy bought a house together in White Plains, four miles from Edgemont, the tiny, affluent town where Judith and I went to school and where our father lived. I'm glad Rebbe moved into a new house with us because it was a fresh start for creating a new family together. Before long, we became Sandy's congregation. After a few stints in synagogues in New Jersey and Brooklyn, she gave up formal institutional work, preferring the nine-to-five routine at nursing homes over the proprietary rights that congregants would exert over her time. Sandy introduced a new level of religious observance to my mother, and her two extra sets of dishes made it easier to start keeping a kosher house. We ate together nearly every night that Judith and I were there, our complicated lives always made to intersect at the dinner table. Mom playfully dubbed us the family Fresser, the Yiddish word for hearty eater, an obvious solution to the fact that we all have different surnames.

An old cozy colonial, that house still radiates warmth. The dining room is decorated with Judaica while the living room displays family photos and quaint tchotchkes: a ceramic

Scrabble set we designed with words like family, love and ethics permanently displayed on the board sits on the coffee table, along with a pottery bowl Jude crafted and a painted wood figure of Patrick Ewing, the stoic big man on our beloved Knicks. Mom made sure that family was always a major part of our lives, so our house has always served as the family gathering place. Though Grandma Lou is still feisty and Tante Karen is three years older, my mother is the family ringmaster, bringing us all together for seders, birthdays and Thanksgiving feasts.

Despite our vibrant private life, when I was in high school my life at Mom's always felt removed from my social life in Edgemont. I rarely brought friends home. In a sea of seemingly buoyant nuclear families, I was the one trying to float on two rafts. None of my friends had divorced parents, let alone a lesbian mom. To retain a cohesive sense of self while moving between my two worlds, I chose to keep them separate. Although I brought Sandy to the school for parents night, I didn't sufficiently narrate the story that everyone could see. My teacher from high school told me recently that she thought that I was "really cool" when I introduced Sandy as Mom's companion to all the other moms and dads, but Mom remembers that I called Sandy her "friend" and Sandy recalls that I simply presented her as "Sandy," never giving her the same title of "stepmother" that I had so easily applied to my father's wife.

When I was a high school senior I finally decided that I had to publicly say the words "my mom is a lesbian." Before the weekly school discussion group I attended, I excitedly told everyone that I had an announcement to make. When it became my turn to speak, my schoolmates anxiously turned toward me to hear my great revelation. My admission of the obvious evoked support, although I sensed some disinterest. People politely asked me a few questions, which I answered, and the discussion quickly turned to other things. I felt pathetically relieved, and promised myself that when I got to college, I would tell people who my mother is, which I did.

A Jewish lesbian couple recently made an autobiographical film and titled it *"Treyf,"* indicating their distance from the traditional strains of Judaism that lump the laws of *kashrut* together with heterosexuality and morality. *Treyf* is a Jewish version of queer, a way for lesbians and gays to create identity by embracing and celebrating their marginal or outlaw status. My lesbian mothers are literally kosher but metaphorically *treyf*, a complicated, challenging ethic that I wrestled with. Besides, I ate bacon cheeseburgers outside their home, so I too was kosher and *treyf*, but not in the same way they were.

Although I became engaged with intellectual issues of identity, sexuality and gender, for many years I never considered applying these new analytical tools to better understand what being Jewish meant to me. I received a perfunctory thrice-weekly Jewish education that was hardly inspiring. Mirthlessly attending until I was 17, I memorized prayers that I did not understand and learned never to give back a scrap of land to the Arabs, that Nazis played catch with Jewish babies on bayonets, and never ever to marry out of the faith. We never discussed Judaism and homosexuality. My family and my education grounded me in Judaism, but I never took my identity seriously until Mom and Rebbe raised my consciousness by labeling me a Jew and challenging me to be a Jew as they were Jews.

From my senior year in high school to my sophomore year in college, I was in love with a woman who was not Jewish. After we had been dating for about a year, Mom sternly addressed me: I did not raise you to marry someone who isn't Jewish. Another time she voiced her disapproval by informing me as I was foraging in the kitchen that Sandy does not perform intermarriages. Rebbe would happily marry two men or women, as long as they were both Jewish, Mom reminded me, but she would never officiate at the union of Jew and Gentile. I said something like, yeah, whatever, and left the room. At 18, I wasn't in the mood to consider how the fate of the Jewish people hung on who I dated. As a part-time family member, I thought that I could be outside its jurisdiction. But at the same time, Mom's dissenting opinion resonated with me. She planted a seed of doubt that was nurtured by my own positive associations with our family.

To my Grandpa, I — by dating a non-Jew — was the one who threatened Jewish continuity, not my lesbian mother.

My girlfriend was baffled by how my mother, who struggled for the freedom to love women, could then disapprove of another form of love. I tried to explain it to her, but at the time I had difficulty understanding this apparent paradox myself. It wasn't until months later, one Rosh Hashanah, that I appreciated that Jewish values could only be transmitted by people who valued being Jewish. Between dinner and dessert, my Grandpa Ben quietly said that he had something to tell me. I walked with him to the living room, away from the usual din of Mom and her sister's cackling laughter, and he firmly whispered to me, Daniel, you're expected to marry a Jewish girl. These words from a man who as a boy had fled the Cossacks across Siberia with his mother were sobering. Grandpa echoed Mom: I was the one who threatened Jewish continuity, not my lesbian mothers, who were an ironclad chain that linked me to our religion and culture.

Now, a kiddush cup and a set of Shabbat candlesticks sit on my radiator, unused housewarming presents that Mom and Rebbe gave me a year and a half ago for my first post-college apartment. The awakening I've had to my Jewish identity has, as yet, no denouement. I am 24, and most of my questions about my Jewish identity remain tantalizingly unresolved, encouraging me to move through Jewish culture with antennae poised to receive those transmissions that resonate for me. My mothers' commitment to their own Jewish life is a message that got through. Their commitment to *my* Jewish life is still being received with static. ■

Daniel Belasco, who lives in Brooklyn, works for the National Foundation for Jewish Culture.

The Hudson River School of Tashlikh

in which artist Mindy Lewis casts away her crumbs

1990. I am in the habit of cycling down to the Boat Basin after work every day to revive my spirits; descending from the noise of the city to the peace of twilight by the river. I ride back and forth until I find a bench that beckons, lean my bike against it, take my watercolors from my backpack, and attempt to catch the shift of colors as the last beams of daylight filter down into night. I am drawn to this edge of the city because I have a hunger for sky, for water, for small sounds and wind, for some sense of vastness.

Today is the beginning of the Jewish New Year. Although I don't observe the holidays, I seize the opportunity to work only a half-day, getting home early to change into my biking gear. As I set out towards the park, the streets whisper the hushed excitement of people hurrying home for the holiday. Pedaling fast, I whiz past Broadway to Riverside, past the gnarled oak that points the way down the hill. I choose the path that goes around the Soldiers and Sailors' monument, at its base a semicircle of Civil War cannonballs, half-buried in the earth; frozen in time as if waiting for a giant pool cue to break their formation, awakening them to action.

I pedal down the path to the right, past the railroad underpass that trains sometimes still pass through, whistling eerily, hidden from view. A right turn brings me into a tunnel under the highway. I sing a resounding note and hear the accoustic equivalent of a rainbow. An arc of river is visible through the tunnel's mouth until I tear through and enter the riverside evening.

It is quieter down here. Trees line up, arching their crooked limbs over the path to the marina, which we Upper West Siders refer to as the Boat Basin. I approach, welcomed by peaceful creakings and clankings, and the slightly fetid salty smell of low tide.

I pass the boats and find an empty bench, park my bike, and take in the view. Across a blue-gray expanse of river is the New Jersey shoreline, looking peaceful and stolid; benign hills punctuated by boxy highrises. I have painted this view in many of its different moods: urban/industrial, stormy and mysterious, transcendent. Today the sky is a cheerful cerulean, clear and transparent, with a yellowish haze towards the horizon.

This is my favorite time of day for painting—late afternoon, just before sunset. The light changes as I paint, the sky turning a rich cobalt, pale rose bleeding up from the horizon. Clouds gather and are blown upwards, offset by gray-shadowed undersides. On the river, light and shadow swirl into patterns of silver and purple. I work fast. It is a code of sensation—blue, then purple; green to ochre, red. Soon, paper saturated, I stop to let it dry.

Something is different. The walkway is becoming crowded…with groups of men in black suits and hats, like flocks of crows. Orthodox Jews, down by the river? They walk up to the railing and lean on it, taking hands from pockets and flicking them over the water. Some *daven*, bending their knees and bowing in prayer.

I know there are some pagan elements left in Judaism. But they do not belong here, obstructing my view. I feel a frisson of annoyance. Let them stay in their synagogues! The river is my territory.

"It's Rosh Hashanah. We're casting our sins. It's called *Tashlikh*."

Nice to have a 12-year-old for a teacher. I feel suddenly ashamed to be wearing bluejeans and painting on the holiday. I am, after all, a Jew. Or am I? I certainly don't feel much in common with these Jews, in their peculiar old-world garb. I find them unsightly, their refusal to inhabit the modern world embarrassing. This boy, however, seems open and friendly; just a regular kid. "Happy New Year," I tell him.

"Thanks." He looks surprised. "You're Jewish?"

"Yes." I think of my little Jewish Grandma, Sophie, from the Bronx. "I wasn't brought up religious, but I'm still Jewish."

"Happy New Year. *Shana tova*," he mumbles.

I swirl a brush in water. "Do you like to paint?"

"When I was little, but I don't do it anymore. In school, it's for girls. I'd like to, though."

His candor surprises me. "Well…all you need is to sit down and do it, and be willing to make a mess. It takes practice, but it's worth it." I resume painting. "Where do you go to school?"

He tells me the name of his yeshiva and points behind us. I know the big corner building on Riverside Drive; I've often biked past the boys playing ball in front of the Soldiers and Sailor's monument, yelling and running around, their brightly colored yarmulkes somehow staying on their heads.

"Cast away from yourselves your transgressions,
And create within yourselves a new heart and spirit."
—Ezekiel 18:31

I sense a presence on my right and look up to see a boy, maybe 12 or 13, sitting next to me, watching me paint. He is wearing the dark clothes of the Orthodox, complete with yarmulke and braided fringes hanging from his belt. The coiled curls of his light brown *payes* frame the pale moon of his face.

"Hi." I'm not sure if he'll want to talk with me.

"What're you painting?" He leans towards me slightly, bracing his hands on the bench.

I point a brush towards the river. "I'm painting the view, there."

He looks towards New Jersey, then down at my painting. "Looks just like it."

I smile.

"What's going on tonight? I mean, what's everybody doing down here?"

I look again at my bench-mate. He looks well-fed, probably doted on by his parents, as Jewish boys often are. Probably much-loved and much-disciplined. I wonder who he'll be when he grows up. I can't imagine he'll be the kind of young man interested in conversing with a painter on a park bench.

The light suddenly blazes up, gold pouring down from the sky, pooling onto the tops of waves, gilding the river. The sun, blood-orange, pokes a hole through the clouds and streams outward, a fan of dark and light beams, straight out of a Renaissance painting. It's spectacular, the kind of sunset you get to see once a year, if you happen to be lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time.

I turn to my young companion. "Amazing, isn't it?"

"Yeh," he says, but I can't tell if he means it. Swathed in the pudgy inscrutability of puberty, he's hard to read. He

looks at my painting, then at the spectacle in front of us. "I wish I could do that!" he proclaims, and I feel a sudden bond with him; he is right there with me in this glorious moment.

And so it is, gold streaming from the sky, clouds ablaze; red above, purple below. In the Hudson fire swirls with silver and ink. My hands fly; the light of the sunset passing through my eyes, down into my fingers, through my brush, onto the paper in pools of color. My way of praising creation.

A middle-aged man in black appoaches the bench, and my young friend looks up. This must be his father. *"Shayna tohva,"* I say uncertainly, pronouncing it wrong.

He looks at the boy, then at me. *"L'shana tova."* Polite, but not entirely friendly. A quick gesture of his head raises his son from the bench. "Time for dinner." He ruffles his son's hair.

I try to make contact. "Your son's been keeping me company while I paint."

The boy's father nods a polite smile in my direction. I immediately feel foolish—as if this man could care less about my painting. He does not realize that for me, it is a spiritual act, like prayer.

"Goodbye," I say to the boy, "Nice talking with you."

"Bye," he says. Off they go down the path, two silhouetted figures merging with the others heading home for dinner. I keep painting. The light has started to fade. The streetlamps come on. The Jersey lights twinkle; the bridge will soon be a diamond bracelet on night's wrist.

I pack up quickly, flinging my dirty water onto the ground behind me. As I balance the wet painting on top of my backpack, a shadow falls across it. A homeless man, pushing a broken-down cart filled with his possessions, has stopped in front of me.

At twilight the homeless appear—sleeping on benches, in tunnels, under trees; modern-day trolls, reminders of everything we don't want to happen to us.

The man points to my sketchbook. "What you doin'? Let me see that!" I hand him my painting, the colors barely distinguishable in the yellow lamplight.

He looks more closely. "Yeah, you got it, girl! How you do that?"

Why should it surprise me that this man, with his bags and boxes and bedroll, cares about art? It is something we have in common. That, and taking refuge in this margin of the city.

The Jersey lights twinkle. A homeless man stops in front of my sketchpad.

What did it mean to be a Jew? The word was tinged with bourgeois undertones. I inherited my mother's desire to transcend her old-world immigrant roots, but rejected the materialism that came naturally to prosperous second-generation Jews: women displaying their clothes and jewelry in synagogue, and families competing to throw the biggest bar mitzvah with the most food and best band. I wished at all costs to avoid these spectacles, but until the age of 14 I was powerless to resist, and suffered through them, awkward and itchy.

Then came the '60s, when I finally had a chance to rebel. I cut high school and spent my days in Central Park, walking, reading, painting. Blue trees, purple rocks, with faces and eyes and spiders hidden in them. I memorized songs by Bob Dylan and Phil Ochs, etching their messages of alienation into my soul. I smoked cigarettes, drank, smoked pot, took acid. I dressed in dashikis, swam in the Central Park lake, and made out with scraggly longhaired teenage boys. I went to the first Human Be-In in the Sheep Meadow. I ironed my hair to make it stick-straight and wore Erase on my lips, trying to erase the self I was born into.

I read books about Buddhism, existentialism, mythology. I identified with Sisyphus, Prometheus, the sufferings of Christ. Wanting to be like Siddhartha, I weighed each word before I spoke. I stopped sleeping, burning incense late into the night. I impaled myself on my loneliness and anger. A few years later, I hung a cross on the wall of the bedroom of my first apartment and sold my grandmother's Shabbos candlesticks at a street fair. I believed that in breaking my ties to my family I was choosing spiritual non-attachment.

1991. Twilight. The Jewish holidays have rolled around again. I sit on my bed in the dark, looking at the silhouettes of buildings against the violet New York dusk. My dad, sick in the nursing home, has had a crisis. For the second week in a row, a nurse has called to say he might not live through the weekend. Feeling forlorn, I find myself thinking about my grandmother. How good it would be to see her again, to feel once again the warmth of family. I suddenly decide to go to synagogue. Nobody else I know goes, so I will go alone.

I put on dark slacks and a silk blouse, gather my keys, pet the cat, and am out the door, rushing into the evening to find a synagogue. This is the Upper West Side; there are a gaggle of them up here. An acquaintance has mentioned a small Conservative synagogue with an alternative slant, in the west 80s. I let my feet lead me. Before long I am at the door. An usher greets me.

"Are you a member?"

I shake my head.

"You have to have a ticket."

"I'll be happy to send a contribution. It would mean a lot to me to come to services. I'll just stand in the back."

He confers with another usher, then allows me in, telling me to sit where I like, as long as I will give up my seat to a member of the congregation if asked. I agree, and walk upstairs to the sanctuary, shaky-legged and sweaty-palmed, and choose a seat far back on the left. All around me are families: mothers, fathers and children; grandmothers and grandfathers. There is a buzz of talk. As far as I can see, I am the only single person there. I feel like an intruder, a vagrant.

A mournful chord silences the room. "By authority of the court on high and by the authority of this court below…we hereby declare that it is permitted to pray with those who have transgressed." At least I am welcome here.

I listen to the congregation recite *Vidui*, a litany of repentance.

With each phrase congregants rap loose fists on the area over their hearts. We abuse, we betray, we are cruel…We gossip, we hate, we insult…We mock, we neglect, we oppress…We pervert, we quarrel, we rebel…. This is new to me. Not at all like the abstract prayers of Thee and Thou, conquest and might that I remember from my childhood. Psychologically specific. Something for everyone. If I feel like a sinner, I'm in good company.

We rise and recite: We have sinned against you…wittingly and unwittingly…through arrogance… through selfishness…stubbornness …and by succumbing to dismay. Each verse of spoken confession is followed by asking forgiveness, sung in Hebrew. Though I don't know the words, I find myself humming the beautiful, mournful melody.

The congregation chants softly, "On Yom Kippur it is decided…who will live and who will die." Whether or not I believe this, I close my eyes and pray for my father.

We abuse, we betray, we are cruel…We gossip, we hate, we insult… Something for everyone.

Shana tova. Everyone wishes each other a sweet new year. I turn and head down the stairs, alone among strangers, towards the cool air and light streaming in the door. *Shana tova.*

1995. A new friend, Marilyn, invites me to spend the holidays with artist friends in the balcony at a West Side synagogue where they welcome non-members if there is room. After the morning service I go for a walk in Riverside Park. It is a mild, clear day, and down by the river congregants from different synagogues converge and mingle. Boats bob peacefully on the water.

Dizzy from fasting, I walk more slowly than usual. Looking at the world from this slowed-down vantage point reminds me of how the world looked when I was a child—things looming large and colorful, people individual and unique, with distinctive faces, smells and voices. Perhaps this slow strolling is part of what the Sabbath is supposed to be like, not just strict laws of what you must not do.

That evening, on my way to synagogue for the closing ceremony, as I turn west on 88th Street, a spectacle awaits me. A small group of people are gathered in front of a brownstone. A woman standing on the stoop, holding a box of corn flakes, is in animated debate with a younger woman who gestures with an open box of crackers. A young man squats near the curb, peering under a car, while another is bent over, hands on knees, talking to the ground.

"What's going on?"

One of the women turns to me. "There's a chicken in the street. We're trying to figure out what to do with him. He's terrified." She throws a handful of cornflakes into the street and makes clucking sounds. "Here, chick, chick…"

I go to the curb and there, behind the tire of a parked car, is a large golden rooster. His red comb trembles as he darts back and forth. He gives a half-hearted peck. I try not to laugh. Dogs, cats, birds I am accustomed to, but a chicken loose in the streets of the city is a ludicrous mix.

"Maybe he's afraid of us. Let's give him room." The rooster runs into the street.

"Have you called the ASPCA?" I ask.

"They don't deal with chickens."

"The Humane Society?"

"Yes, but they're closed now. They said they'd send someone tomorrow."

A car turns east on 88th from Riverside, right towards our rooster, who stands transfixed in the middle of the road. "Shoo! Shoo!" we yell. I run into the street, arms out, corraling him to the other side of the street. We take turns protecting him from oncoming cars.

Across the street a small crowd has gathered under the awning of a building. The doorman and I exchange a few words. He is sympathetic. "I used to work on a farm. The chickens, they ain't too smart...poor fella, lost in the city."

"Where did he come from?" someone asks.

One of the guys looks up, shrugs. "Who knows? Must have escaped from somewhere, maybe from a kosher butcher. I think it's a Jewish holiday today."

It hits me slowly. The chicken has escaped from ritual sacrifice performed on Yom Kippur, left over from the old world. I'd heard from a friend that this ritual, called *kapores*, is still practiced in some of the more Orthodox synagogues. There are dozens of them in this neighborhood. The chicken is held by the feet and waved overhead while a prayer of thanksgiving is said for being allowed to be inscribed in the book of life for one more year. Your life for my life, is the gist of it. Then the chicken is slaughtered.

The chicken looks around with his glass bead eyes. This little guy is a survivor. If he doesn't get hit by a car or die of starvation, he too will be inscribed in the book of life. He is a chosen chicken; at least for the time being he has escaped his fate. Running from the clutches of tradition, he is far from farm society, but at least he is free. Of course, there is the problem of adapting to the city. I too have run for my life, unaware that perhaps I am being watched over...

The sky is now dark. A small batallion of onlookers is busy protecting the chicken, so I say goodbye and head toward the synagogue. Maybe I'll be in time to hear the final blast of the shofar signal the beginning of the new year. I stride up the steps, only to be stopped by an usher.

"Full house, I'm sorry, you can't get in without a ticket."

"But I was here this morning!" I can see the families within.

"Sorry, but those are the rules."

I can't believe he won't let me in. Standing outside on the synagogue steps, I take one more look through the open door. The night air is pierced by the wail of the ram's horn.

1997. Two years have passed. I go to synagogue with my friend Jay, whom I've known for years, lost touch with, then met again by chance in synagogue, where he'd come to say Kaddish for his mother. In the late afternoon, a group meets in synagogue to head en masse to the river for Tashlikh, to symbolically discard the sins of the previous year. In my pockets are torn pieces of a slice of whole-grain bread from the health food store. Inside, the congregation discusses the ritual. One woman protests having the river-dwellers, fish and fowl, eat our sins and suggests we throw pocket-lint instead of breadcrumbs into the river. She is serious, but I think it is absurd to take things so literally. I don't want the fish and ducks choking on my pocket-lint.

We troop down to the river, around 70 of us, taking a stroll to the park on a fine Indian-summer October afternoon. We walk past the oak tree, down the hill, under the tunnel, and soon I am leaning against the iron fence beside the river. I think about what I most want to let go of, and toss away one by one along with my breadcrumbs: confusion, doubt, bitterness, hopelessness, despair, arrogance, aggression and lack of compassion.

I walk down the path, hair blowing behind me, greeting people I do not know with a lighthearted *shana tova,* and they return my greeting. The river flashes its mutating crescents of light and color. My river, transformed into an open-air synagogue. I breathe in sunlight and fresh air. Ducks float by and nibble at the crumbs. ■

Mindy Lewis is a painter, graphic designer and writer.

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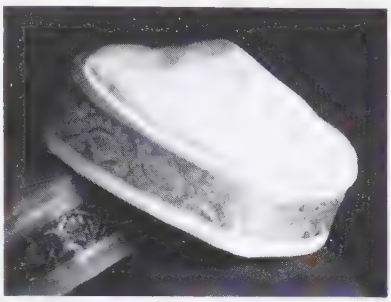

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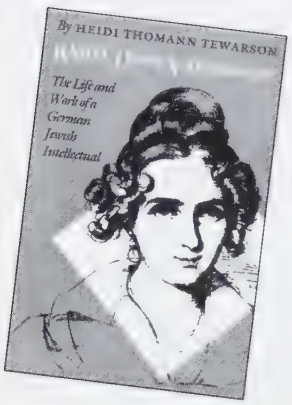
A "Salon Jewess" Revisited

by Deborah Hertz

Hannah Arendt's Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess
(First Complete Edition)
edited by Liliane Weissberg
Johns Hopkins University Press, $29.95

Rahel Levin Varnhagen: The Life and World of a German Jewish Intellectual
by Heidi Thomann Tewarson
University of Nebraska Press, $45, $20 paper



I can remember the look of the book, the quiet library all around me, my agitation while I sat reading. The year was 1970. The place was the Judaica reading room of the Hebrew University Library in Jerusalem, on the Givat Ram campus. It was my Junior Year Abroad and I was writing a paper on Hannah Arendt. On the shelves next to the Leo Baeck Institute Year Books lay Arendt's biography of Rahel Levin Varnhagen, "salon Jewess" of 19th-Century Berlin. Almost every time I came to the reading room I would take the book off the shelf, reading randomly. I must have been seduced by the voice of one smart Jewish woman of our century telling the story of another smart Jewish woman from the 19th Century. That slender blue book sent me to Poland in 1979 to find the original Rahel Varnhagen letters that Arendt had thought lost when she published the 1958 biography. Indeed, her book sent me on a whole series of intellectual journeys.

I was seduced by the voice of one smart Jewish woman of our century telling the story of another smart Jewish woman from the 19th Century.

Luckily for all of us, other scholars have been pondering the mysteries of Rahel Varnhagen and Hannah Arendt. In fact both women have become infinitely more chic and famous than either was in the rainy winter of 1970. A dedicated cadre of feminist literary scholars from Berlin to Turin to Philadelphia have been at work at the Jagiellonian Library in Poland, preparing several volumes of hitherto unpublished letters by Rahel Varnhagen. There is also a great deal of new criticism and interpretive work on Rahel and her circle.

Moreover, thanks to a parallel industry in Hannah Arendt studies we now know much more about Arendt's state of mind when she first began to write the biography, in 1931, in Berlin. At the time, Arendt was seeking a post-assimilationist role model. She was becoming a Zionist then and this biography was in many ways more about the new political self she was creating than about Rahel Varnhagen. Still, the larger point is that Arendt's decision to explore Rahel Varnhagen's Jewish identity was immensely innovative. Arendt thought she had captured a Rahel Varnhagen who was less successful in her assimilation than anyone had before suggested.

Rahel Levin Varnhagen was born of a wealthy Jewish family in Berlin in 1773. When she was in her 20s, she hosted a socially avant-garde salon. At 43, she became a Lutheran and married Karl August Varnhagen von Ense, a sometime diplomat and liberal journalist. Through the 1820s, and until her death in 1833, the couple hosted an important salon in Berlin. As a saucy intellect and an indefatigable letter writer, Rahel was famous in the Berlin of her day. But she may well have passed into history had it not been for the posthumous publication of a collection of her letters and aphorisms, which remained popular throughout the 19th Century.

Liliane Weissberg's new edition of the Arendt biography teaches us much about both Arendt and Varnhagen. Scholars will rejoice in Weissberg's meticulous scholarly notes, a task that Arendt had neglected. In her illuminating introduction, Weissberg tells the full story of the book manuscript's history. When Arendt left Germany in 1933, she had not finished writing the biography. In 1938, in Paris, she wrote the final two chapters. It was first published in English in 1958, and then in German two years later. (Weissberg's extensive research in Arendt's unpublished letters shows how important the book's publication was for Arendt's financial claims against the German government. The Varnhagen biography constituted proof that had she not been driven from her homeland, she would have become a full professor, and thus deserved her back salary, which she was indeed awarded in 1971.)

Weissberg is well-versed in the lore about the salon era and also in the byways of Arendt's intellectual history. She does not, however, try to settle any of the disputed issues in the Rahel Varnhagen scholarship. For instance, Weissberg does not evaluate Arendt's claim that Varnhagen did not quite succeed in her assimilation quest and did not really hate her Jewish origins.

But one wonderful result of Weissberg's labors is that many readers of her new edition will be hungry for more Rahel Varnhagen. Heidi Thomann Tewarson has not written a standard biography. She uses the letters to depict particular stages of Rahel's life. Tewarson in no way neglects the complexity of Rahel's Jewish identity, but she does provide much

more attention to her views about women and her plight as a woman than did Arendt. Tewarson quotes generously from Rahel's letters, and her own narrative is a pleasant and stimulating read.

One of the letters that Tewarson cites helps us grasp why Varnhagen was so admired for her bracing honesty. The subject of this 1808 letter to her mother is the question of Varnhagen's single status. Two romances with noblemen had failed to become marriages when she was in her late 20s and early 30s. By 1808, she was 35. Her stipend from her inheritance was reduced because of the family's economic losses during the Napoleonic occupation of Berlin. Then her mother, who had always been lukewarm about Rahel's unusual friendships, moved out, leaving Rahel more emotionally and financially burdened than before.

Listen to the letter she sent her mother that summer, in which she presents "my situation one last time. My age you know; my great inner distress will forever remain a mystery to you. Upon you I depend: therefore, only you could protect me and, through your loving treatment, guarantee a haven for my heart." She complains about how little money her brothers are allotting to her. "Good; all right! If I cost more than the interest from the capital which I could receive upon marriage, then I reply that I want to calculate the same for the others.... That you granted me [my] freedom I cannot thank you for in spite of my greatest respect; if I had not had it I would have been outraged. And in return you cannot say that I used it to anyone's disadvantage, except to my own; each individual is his own person." She concluded the letter with the words: "grant me to depend on you directly, now and in the future, as long as I remain unmarried; this is the only favor I still dare ask! As these are the last words about my miserably pitiful story." A letter like this shows us the inner pain with which she paid for her public success.

We will eventually become more clear about Varhagen's status as a possible role model. Nonetheless, Arendt, Weissberg, and Tewarson all admired Rahel Varnhagen so much that none of the three found it easy to create much distance from her. In future work we must still decide if she was more of a self-hating Jew than any of her biographers have hitherto realized. Perhaps those who continue to write about the loves, the life, and the times of Rahel Varnhagen will be able to admire the risks she took and still discover how much of the rejection she experienced was an unhappy consequence of her own radical social ambitions.

Deborah Hertz is professor of history at Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, New York. She is the author of Jewish High Society in Old Regime Berlin *(Yale University Press), as well as an edition of Rahel Levin Varnhagen's letters in German.*

Which Lilith? Feminist Writers Re-Create the World's First Woman

edited by Enid Dame, Lilly Rivlin and Henny Wenkart
Jason Aronson Inc., $40

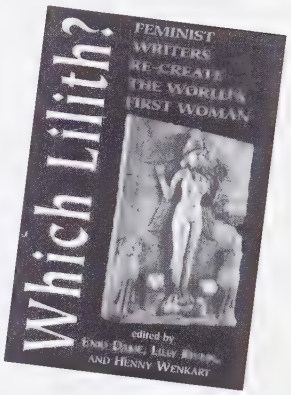
"Which Lilith?" A feisty pun right from the get-go. And Witch Lilith appears in various guises throughout this rich collection prepared, as the tiny type up front explains, under the auspices of the Jewish Women's Resource Center, a project of National Council of Jewish Women New York Section.

The story of Lilith has been inspiring and obsessing Jewish feminists since the 1970s, if not before: in the Beginning, God created the first woman equal with first man; then, Jewish men called her Lilith and interpreted her independence as a menace to Jews of both sexes; come the final quarter of the 20th Century, Jewish women revisited the ancient sources to set the record straight and give Lilith a good press (witness LILITH magazine). The recreation remains a work in progress. The fresh offering of Jewish feminist poetry and prose in *Which Lilith?* is yet another step, inspired by some very smart, witty Jewish women.

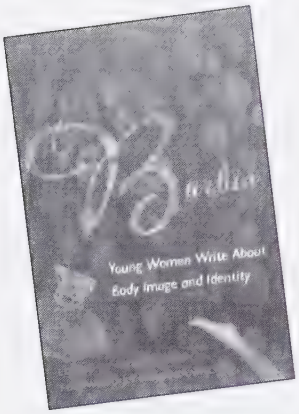
Which Lilith? embraces the many aspects of the wind spirit/screech owl/goddess-demon and her long history before she ever became a Jewish male warning to uppity Jewish women. On the book's cover appears a Mesopotamian bas relief of Lilith—a divine female with rounded breasts and hips, hands holding symbols of power, wings at rest. And below, the shock of shapely legs ending in huge talons. Inside, we get a crude Jewish amulet to protect women in childbirth from the torments of Lilith—the demon of Jewish male fears. Here Lilith stands bound in chains, legs ending not in talons but imprisoned in stone socks.

The book's 27 years of feminist re-visions of Lilith represent barely a blip in Lilith's several-thousand-year history, but even over this short time span changes have occurred. Lilly Rivlin's opening essay, which appeared in Ms. magazine in 1972, proclaims her first awareness of the "cosmic sexist conspiracy." Ah, those early heady days of feminism. Twenty-six years later, we get Rivlin's seemingly autobiographical, Erica Jongian "Lilith Healing and Aging," the tale of a 60-year-old highly sexed female filmmaker drawn to the Red Sea. Following in Lilith's footsteps, she's energized by the seductions of a young Arab. Lilith lives.

From the early days of Jewish feminism comes the freshness of Judith Plaskow's "The Coming of Lilith," with God and Adam afraid as Eve and Lilith return to the Garden of Eden "bursting with possibilities." Two decades later, some of the most brilliant Lilith stories come in poetry—Susan Gold's



Thirty years of feminist revisions of Lilith are barely a blip in her history.



stunningly erotic Lilith and Eve "In the Garden" and Helen Papell's "Achsah in the Spring." Throughout the collection, there's a sisterly exchange of references to other contributors' interpretations of Lilith, which include the writing of Aviva Cantor—a founding mother of LILITH magazine—whose historical-political-economic-feminist analysis of Lilith appeared in the magazine's first issue in 1976, with an updated version in this collection.

The collection moves from "Overview," with various retellings of the Lilith story and history, to "Lilith and Men" and "Lilith as Transgressive Woman" to "Lilith and Other Women," "Lilith and the Family," "Lilith as Archetype, Female Principle" to, finally, "Lilith in Exile." In fact, most of the entries could fit several places. Lilith is not easily contained. The editors have no desire to have the last word on Lilith. In fact, they call on women to keep revising our traditions. *Which Lilith?* is not an enigma but a challenge.

—Amy Stone

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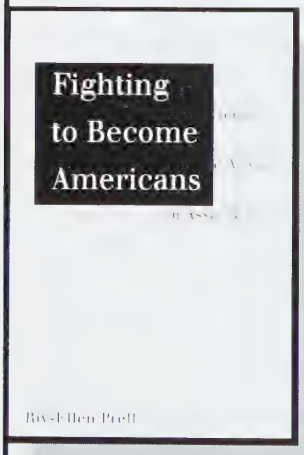
Adios, Barbie: Young Women Write about Body Image and Identity

edited by Ophira Edut,
with a foreword by Rebecca Walker
Seal Press, distributed by Publishers Group West, $14.95

Being 20 years old and living in a college dorm I have discovered the painfully obvious: Women are insecure about their bodies. Whenever my neighbor borrows clothes she reminds my friends and me how "fat and ugly" she is, and informs us that she hasn't spent enough time working out that week. It is a difficult ritual to witness knowing that she probably says worse things to herself when she is alone. *Adios, Barbie* is a fabulous and much-needed anthology that bravely speaks about personal struggles with body image and identity. Fat, hair, sexuality, noses, butts, skin color, and many other taboos are openly confronted in this book. The essayists are strong women dealing with the same issues my friends and I do every time we look in the mirror.

The editor, 25-year-old Ophira Edut, founded HUES (Hear Us Emerging Sisters) magazine for

Why do Jewish men and women fight?



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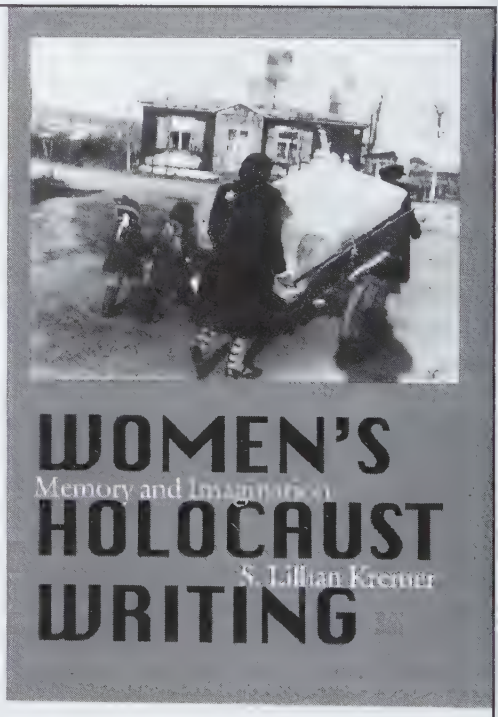

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women in their 20s. The foreword by Rebecca Walker, daughter of author Alice Walker, steers the book's purpose when she asks, "Where, in this ongoing discussion of body image, is the story of the lover who celebrated the hips we found too narrow or too wide, and caused us to see ourselves anew; the story of the Jewish nose that connects us to an ancestral past; the testimony about that 'extra' thirty pounds that make us feel solid and abundant rather than slovenly or unattractive?" Lisa Jervis, the editor and publisher of Bitch: A Feminist Response to Pop Culture, contributes a wonderful essay about 'keeping' her Jewish nose. Each essay is full of energy and spirit that battles our culture's current beauty standards.

Leslie Heywood's article about female athletes claims, "We don't have to reject our bodies, because today girl doesn't mean weak little wuss, woman doesn't mean doormat, giving up all your time and dreams for other people. We can have muscles now, and ostensibly what those muscles stand for: power. self-determination, presence, a place in the world." Reading this reaffirms that women of all shapes, sizes and colors are beautiful.

—Lori Lyons

Two Jews, Three Opinions

edited by Sandee Brawarsky and Deborah Mark
Perigree, $24.95

Two Jews, Three Opinions is a wonderful collection of *Twentieth Century American Jewish Quotations,* as the book is subtitled. Unlike other Jewish quote books, it is organized by category, which helps make the information easily accessible to the dabbling reader. The divisions are very specific

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and demonstrate the wide range of topics on which Jews have expressed their opinions. Some surprising contemporary sections include those on HIV-AIDS, Black-Jewish relations, computers, delis, and the trial of O.J. Simpson. A wide range of people are quoted in this book—from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel to Howard Stern. Although many women are quoted, they are predominantly in predictable categories: feminism, friendship and women in Judaism. The variety of sources adds a unique flavor to this book, which helps to represent modern Jewish culture.

On Ethics: "How does one teach children to live an ethical life? By walking hand in hand to the synagogue. That is when sons and daughters ask their questions."

—Francesca Lunzer Kritz, 1998

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—Letty Cottin Pogrebin, 1980

On Gay and Lesbian Issues: "A significant number of *frum* [Orthodox] Jews, including myself, have decided not to throw the baby out with the bathwater ... Aren't there countless fine people in all Jewish circles who neglect one major mitzvah or another?"

—Student at New York's Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, 198

On Ideology: "There are two sides to every issue. One side is right and the other is wrong, but the middle is always evil."

—Ayn Rand, 196

On Women and Judaism: "Being a Jewish woman is very much like being Alice at the Hatter's tea party. We did not participate in making the rules, nor were we there at the beginning of the party. At best, a jumble of crockery is being shoved aside to clear a place for us. At worst, we are only tantalized with the tea and bread-and-butter, while being confused, shamed, and reproached for our ignorance."

—Rachel Adler, 198

—L.L.

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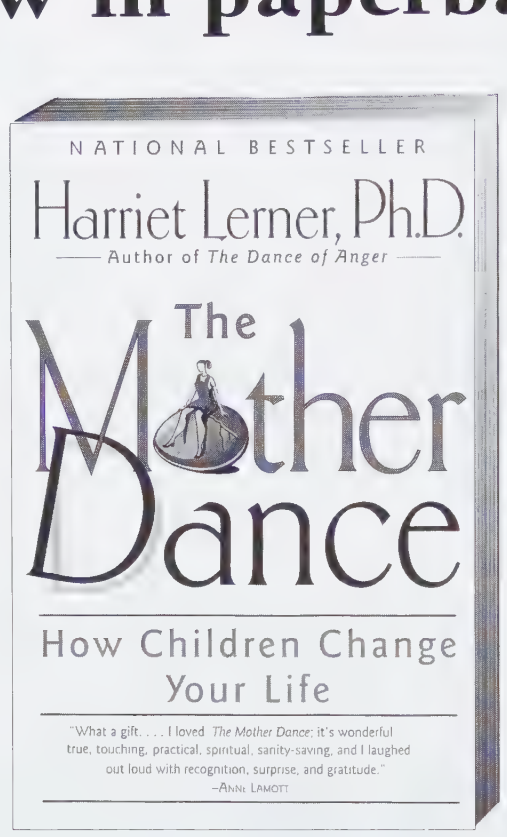
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Moonlight on the Avenue of Faith

by Gina B. Nahai
Harcourt Brace & Company, $24

"It had begun, as tragedies often do, with a woman." In *Moonlight on the Avenue of Faith,* Gina Nahai weaves a vivid, magical tale that begins with one woman's shocking act of liberation, fleeing a synagogue on Yom Kippur. Her story and that of her daughters and granddaughters is rooted in Tehran's Jewish ghetto, where language, faith and history intertwine with the Muslim world. Nahai's novel spans continents and decades: The Holocaust is seen through the lens of the Shah's politics, the violence and chaos of the Islamic revolution, the forced flight of the Jews. Time is fluid, shifting from present-day Los Angeles to mid-century Iran, and back again.

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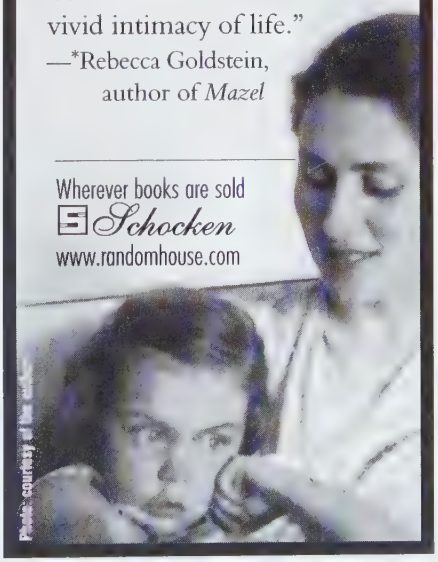

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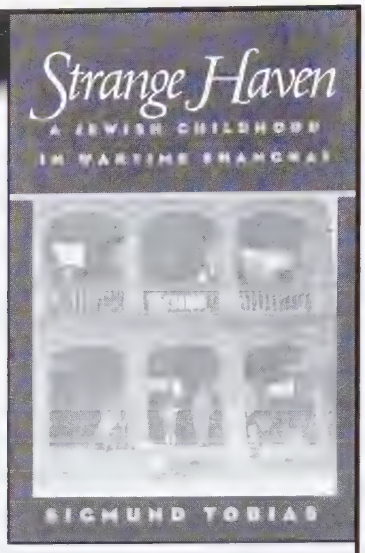

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Foreword by Michael Berenbaum

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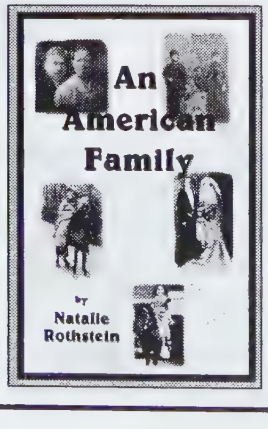

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Lili. Sent off to a Catholic boarding school in Los Angeles, severed from her language, culture and religion, Lili wrestles with the legacy her mother has left her—the ability to choose her own fate along with the losses that such a choice entails. These are women who are "not afraid of exile," but whose very bodies swell with tears over the price of their freedom, and with the still greater cost of not attaining it at all.

—Sarah Walli

Melodious Women

by Marjorie Agosin, translated from the Spanish by Monica Bruno Galmozzi
Latin American Literary Review Press, $13.95

What Are Big Girls Made Of?

by Marge Piercy
Knopf, $25

Writers like Marjorie Agosin and Marge Piercy give poetry a good name. Agosin inscribes her latest collection of poems, "To women, to life..." and structures the volume accordingly. Readers first encounter odes to individual women, both real (Virginia Woolf, Frida Kahlo) and fictitious (Pandora, Lilith). Later, as in "The Women of Bosnia" or "The Secretary," Agosin addresses women known by their roles or nationalities. The last of the book's four sections, "Happiness," reflects themes found earlier but treats them more globally.

Agosin's literary landscape is redolent of cinnamon and gardenias, soft as rain and sharp as bone. Her poems engage all the senses and leave the reader more with feelings than thoughts. She writes organically, builds women from blood and skin, hair and breath. Agosin's gift is giving life to the unknown, the small, the quiet in women's lives.

Marge Piercy is louder, more cerebral and more brash. Like Agosin's, her world is full of sex and food and salt water, but without the velvet edges. She jokes with

he reader, then forces her to see in the mir-or sometimes ugly truths like the "relief" hat follows the grief of losing one's parents. Piercy's latest collection finds her on happi-y familiar terrain as she writes about cats, iving with a middle-aged body, and vio-ence against abortion providers.

"Belly Good" is the perfect prescription for our anorexic age. What a different world we would inhabit if we saw a stomach as a "fully ripe peach" and "maternal cushion radiating comfort." Piercy rejoices in hers, speaks to it, her "prize feather quilt" handed down from mother to daughter.

Buy these books. Keep them by your bed, near your phone at work, on the kitchen table, and savor them. ■

—Karen Prager Kramer

Mothering Without a Map *continued from page 22*

tered. I learned about keeping a home by liv-ing away from my own. And I am learning about motherhood from becoming a mother, hoping that being "second generation" does not necessarily mean walking into parenting with a deficiency.

A therapist once said to me that I should stop thinking about my mother's leaving as having been about me—that she must have had very compelling personal reasons for it. I now believe that her departure was, in some ways, a reenactment of her own abandonment as a child. Knowing this doesn't change my sense of loss, but it helps me to understand what happened in both our lives. And it causes me to shiver when I feel my own natural desires to flee well up after a particularly bad day or week or month. I question my own mothering skills constantly.

In all the years I have known her, my mother has had no stories to tell. At 19, she married a non-Jewish man, began new but empty traditions for her children, and lived a life completely stripped of history. I did not even know that her parents were buried in a nearby cemetery until we attended the funeral of my great-aunt, and saw their headstones a few steps away. It had never occurred to me until that moment, when I was 23 years old, that my mother's parents were actually my grandparents, and that I could and should have had some access to them and their stories.

In my house growing up, there were no family pictures, no stories, no holidays or traditions from my mother's Jewish roots. My mother's father was a photographer for Vanity Fair magazine, but instead of being displayed in our home, his work was shelved in huge, gray filing cabinets in the basement, only to be left behind—"by acci-dent"—when our house was sold. When asked about her father, my mother says that everyone raved about how handsome and talented he was, but all she knows is that he died on her and that she feels no connection with him at all. Her parents had been artis-tic, interesting people, but all I know about them is that they're missing.

I have a friend who is also a "second gen-eration" motherless daughter, whose house growing up was brimming with photographs and other reminders of her mother's parents. Today, when I go to hang a photograph in my own home, I always hesitate. I am drawn to family pictures, even in the homes of strangers. I thirst for them, for the connec-tions they hold, and I drink them in. I envy friends' galleries of family pictures. I've tried to do the same—salvaging a few prints of my grandfather's collection, including a baby picture of my mother and a shot of the woman who was my grandmother—but I can't quite get it right. I worry that even this little reminder of the past hanging in my house will upset my mother. But, unlike her, I crave these meager connections to my past and have forged ahead.

As we eagerly await the birth of our third child, I am still marked by her inability to connect to her past. My husband and I take great pleasure in choosing for them names that, in the Jewish tradition, honor deceased relatives. But I have yet to suggest honoring one of my mother's parents. For me, there is no link to their names—or to their lives. My mother has followed a steep, difficult path to parenting with no map to guide her. While she has faced unbearable tragedy, I too, bear the scars of her losses. This very personal history is beginning to affect a third genera-tion, and as I await my baby's birth, I have to face down the terrors I harbor that I will somehow fail my own children, especially a daughter, because of the complex relation-ship I share with my mother. ■

Karen Paul-Stern is a fundraiser and writer living in Takoma Park, Maryland.

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WRITE READ SEND

"Bad Fathers and Good Mothers of the Bible" and "Millenarian Motherhood: Meanings, Motives and Practices in African Hebrew Israelite Community" are two essays on Jewish motherhood in the forthcoming fall issue of Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues published by the International Research Institute on Jewish Women at Brandeis University (founded in 1997 by Hadassah) and the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem. Subscriptions: $25 ($20 students); single copies: $15 from: *IRIJW, Lown 300A, MS 079, Waltham, MA 02254-9110; fax: (781) 736-2070; IRIJW@brandeis.edu or Schechter Institute, P.O.Box 8600, 91083 Jerusalem, Israel; fax (972-2) 679-0840; dvorahg@iol.co.il.*

Quilted midrashim were created by fabric artist Elizheva R. Hurwich as a fundraiser for Bat Kol, A Feminist House of Study now offering its third summer of feminist text study in Jerusalem, with teachers including Judith Plaskow, Leah Shakdiel and Naamah Kelman. Four different colorful note cards recreate the quilts and help sustain the program. 12 cards for $15, payable to the Shefa Fund. Send to *Bat Kol: A Feminist House of Study, P.O. Box 4047, Philadelphia, PA 19118; (215) 844-8425; batkol@batkol.org*

GOD'S OPEN HAND BY E.R. HURVICH

"God, open your hand and satisfy the needs of all living creatures!" (Psalm 145)

Are You a Jewish Woman of Color? A special issue of Bridges: A Journal for Jewish Feminists and Our Friends wants your unpublished essays, narratives, fiction, poetry, reviews and art. How do you incorporate diverse identities, diverse genealogies and histories? Editors are looking for work "created from outside of a victimization stance." How has your family's identity shifted over generations? How do you and other Jewish women of color enact Jewishness—through ritual and community and as a political stance in given situations? Submit up to 35 pages of prose or 10 poems, in duplicate with a brief bio by June 30 to: *Clare Kinberg, Bridges, PO Box 24839, Eugene, OR 97402; phone/fax (541) 343-7617; ckinberg@pond.net; http://www.pond.net/~ckinberg/bridges*

The traditional Hebrew formulation beginning the grace after meals welcomes only men. Women can use a *seder zimmun* for women to lead each other in these blessings—*gvirotai nevarech*—that was created for the February 1999 conference "Courage to Be Modern and Orthodox" For a bat mitzvah celebration, a wedding shower, or other occasion you can request copies from: *Edah, 47 W. 34th St., #700, New York, NY 10001; (212) 244-7501.*

FRIENDLY SETTINGS

Does your shul or temple ignore its seniors? "Help Opportunities, and Programs for Jewish Elders: An Action Guide for Synagogues" is an amazing compendium of creative programs and suggestions. Want to learn how to train volunteers as "friendly visitors" in nursing homes?

SYNAGOGUE HOPE

How to create a telephone visitation program? Help seniors who are unable to be physically present in synagogue for a family lifecycle event? Find out how in this 140-page publication by Amy Sales, made possible by the Grotta Foundation. $18 from *Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University MS 014, Waltham, MA 02454-9110. (781) 736-2066; fax (781) 736-2070.*

The Jerusalem Open House—*Ha'bait Ha'patuach,* the holy city's first building devoted to gay and lesbian community activities—intends to draw "lesbian settlers from the occupied territories, gay teenagers from area high schools, Haredi Jews from ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods like Me'a She'arim, university students, Arabs from East Jerusalem, and persons of every faith." Founded in 1997, JOH offers a community information line, religious study and support groups, a youth group, anonymous HIV testing, a speaker's bureau, and an Amnesty International group working for the human rights of gays and lesbians.The JOH works closely with: KLAF—the lesbian feminist community, *www.aquanet.co.il/vip/klaf;* The Other 10%—the gay and lesbian student union of the Hebrew University, *www.poboxes.com/asiron*; and TEHILA—Israeli Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays, *www.poboxes.com/tehila.* Contact: *Jerusalem Open House, 7 Ben Yehuda St. (on the pedestrian mall), 3rd floor, Jerusalem, Israel or mail to P.O. Box 33107, 91037 Jerusalem Israel; phone the Jerusalem Infoline: Tuesdays, 20:00-22:00, (972) 2-537-3906 ; US coordinator, Hagai Elad, 47 Saint Botolph St., #3, Boston, MA 02116-6454; (617) 247-8420; fax (617) 266-5832; www.poboxes.com/gayj; gayj@hotmail.com*

HeartBridge Center for Loss and Transition is a nondenominational organization dedicated to providing a safe, supportive environment where grieving children, teens and adult family members or caretakers can share the bereavement process and receive coping and life redirection skills. Services are free to families, schools and the community at various locations, and may include the sending of support materials. Tax-deductible contributions are welcome. *HeartBridge Center for Loss and Transition, 711 West End Ave. #6LS, New York, NY 10025; (212) 865-6742; fax (212) 865-6635.*

Another kind of broth for the Jewish Women's Soul—for a proposed anthology, inspired by a *rosh hodesh* group in California, send short essays and poetry on inspirational Jewish women's themes to *Robin C. Westmiller, 1321 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd. #102, Thousand Oaks, CA 91362; fax: (805) 373-0597; robin@westmiller.com*

A Newsletter of the Israel Association for Feminist and Gender Studies to be sent through the internet is being prepared by Dafna Lemish and Sharon Halevi. Debuting in June, it will list lectures, conferences, news of promotions, awards and offer reviews of recent publications. Contact: *kidma@psy.haifa.ac.il*

Afterword, a new Canadian national Jewish student newspaper appears five times a year and joins other Canadian Jewish student publications such as After the Flood, Bleu et Blanc, CybersPiel, and Grape Juice. Recent articles: "Is Homer Simpson Jewish?" and "When a Sibling Interdates." *Afterword, 44 Reindeer Rd, Toronto, Ontario M3H 2L2; (416) 631-8053; 71562.400@compuserve.com*

The mimeographed study sheets, *gilyonot*—with discussions on the weekly Torah portion—of late great Israeli Bible teacher Nehama Leibowitz, are now available as pamphlets, free of charge, on line, in Hebrew, English, Spanish, French, Portuguese or German. *Rabbi Arnold Samlan, Jewish National Fund, 42 E. 69th St., NY, NY 10021; (212)879-9305 x264; fax (212) 517-3293 jnfed@aol.com*

ECO WELL BEING

Now here's a New Year's Eve idea! A Millennial Embrace on December 31, 1999 will celebrate with a festive human hug of men, women and children around the Dead Sea, dedicated to peace and the conservation of nature for chldren. Co-sponsored by the State of Israel, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. *Jubillennium Organization, 1 Haomanut St., 42160 South Netanya, P.O. Box 8362, Israel; (972-9)835-9494; fax (972-9)885-2068; www.jubillenium.com; info@jubillenium.com*

Mercury-Free Moms is a campaign to rid homes, schools and hospitals of the deadly slippery substance—beginning with mercury thermometers. Obtain a free brochure from *Health Care Without Harm, P.O. Box 6806 Falls Church, VA 22040; (703) 237-2249; noharm@iatp.org; www.noharm.org or www.sustain.org/hcwh*

JEWISH PEACE CORP

Avodah: Jewish Service Corps is a year-long community service program for young Jews who want to work on America's pressing social problems, combining Jewish study and a communal living experience with jobs at non-profit organizations that fight illiteracy and urban poverty, helping the homeless, and organizing community activists. *Rabbi David Rosenn, Avodah, 443 Park Ave. South, 11th fl., New York, NY 10016; (212) 545-7759; fax (212) 686-1353.*

Active, enthusiastic, flexible, innovative and knowledgeable Jews are sought as volunteers for one year of Jewish outreach service creating cultural and social programs, informal and formal Jewish education, holiday programs, arts & crafts and music with people of all ages, in communities in Bulgaria, India, Morocco or Tunisia. *The Jewish Service Corps, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 711 Third Ave., New York, NY 10017; (212) 687-6200; fax (212) 370-5467.*

The Jewish Volunteer Corps sends catalysts for change—aged 22-65—as computer specialists, small business consultants, public health professionals, teacher trainers and agriculturalists to organizations in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Volunteers may also be involved with Jewish community development and democratization and human rights projects. Placements for one to nine months. *American Jewish World Service, 989 Ave of the Americas, 10th fl., New York, NY 10018; (800) 889-7146; fax (212) 736-3463.*

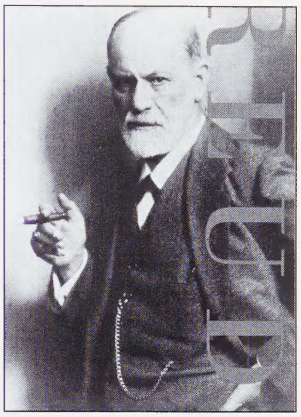
Contributions for Emergency Relief for Kosovar Refugees may be sent to either the American Jewish World Service or the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, addresses above.

TREASURED DISCARDS

Did you replace old Passover haggadahs with new ones this year? Donate your old ones to share with dispersed Jewish communities around the world. Send to *Kulanu Haggadah Project, 1217 Edgevale Rd., Silver Spring, MD 20910-1612; (301) 681-5679; kulanu@ubmail.ubalt.edu*

EXHIBITS

Sigmund Freud: Conflict and Culture is a major exhibition examining the life and ideas of the founder of psychoanalysis who has greatly



influenced popular culture and our notions of identity, memory, childhood, sexuality and meaning itself. Organized by the Library of Congress in cooperation with the Sigmund Freud Museum, Vienna, and the Freud Museum, London. Through September 9 (and traveling later to the Skirball Museum in Los Angeles) at *The Jewish Museum, 1109 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10128; (212) 423-3200.*

Her Mouth is Full of Wisdom: Women, Religion and Learning, a new exhibit focuses on the background and impact of the past decade's widespread and still growing revolution in Orthodox women's studies. Sponsored by the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism and the Leiber Art Exhibition Center on display through July at *Floersheim Museum of Jewish Art and Judaica, Faculty of Jewish Studies Building, Bar Ilan University (entrance Keren Hayesod St.), Ramat Gan, Israel; call for tour (972-3) 531-8286.*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

Introducing FLASH Rosenberg

Humorist, Photographer, Cartoonist and Bewilderness Guide

Whenever I'm introduced, people can't help but wonder, "Is Flash her real name?" YES! Flash is short for Susan. Same number of letters (So my numerology is not messed up), but only one syllable, so I can come quicker when called. It's not an affectation. It's no secret that at birth, I was named Susan. A perfectly good, mid-century, American name. In fact, when I moved to New York City a few years ago, my agent suggested I go back to using Susan. "Susan is more serious. It might help your work be taken more seriously." *Yeah, right...*but it'd be really weird to use a name nobody called me. Besides I've already cleared it with the authorities.

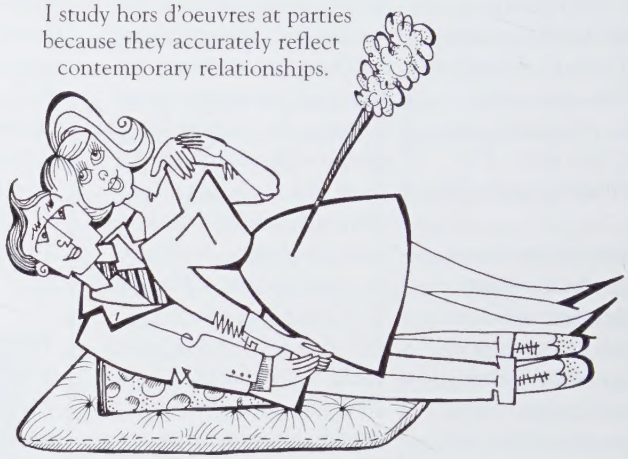
I went back to Delaware and asked my parents if they'd be offended if I dumped the name they so lovingly gave me and used Flash instead. And my Dad said, "If we would have known you were going to turn out the way you turned out, we would've named you Flash." And Mom said, "When anyone sneers, 'Did your mother name you Flash?' you just tell them I gave you the spirit that earned the name, and that's good enough for me."

So it's all settled. It's official. I'm Flash Rosenberg on the credit card.

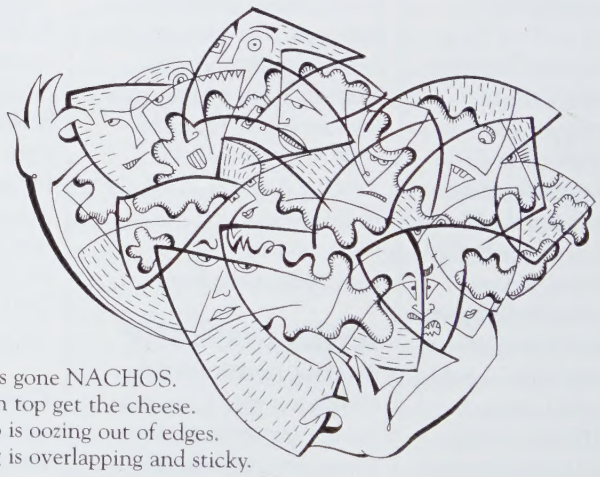
But another part of me is Eric. I mean, if I had been a boy, my name would have been Eric. Do you know your opposite sex name? Well, you can imagine my glee at finding a bowling ball named Eric at a flea market. I took that ball right home and now my anima feels reunited with my animus.

But I certainly *don't* care about who I was in a former life. Eric interests me as the life I almost lived. But why all the fuss about Past Lives? Why waste time trying to figure out if I was *Nefertiti*... or *Cleopatra?* I plan to use all my time living *this* life with so much passion and wild good deeds that someone in the future will wish she was Flash Rosenberg in her former life. ■

I study hors d'oeuvres at parties
because they accurately reflect
contemporary relationships.

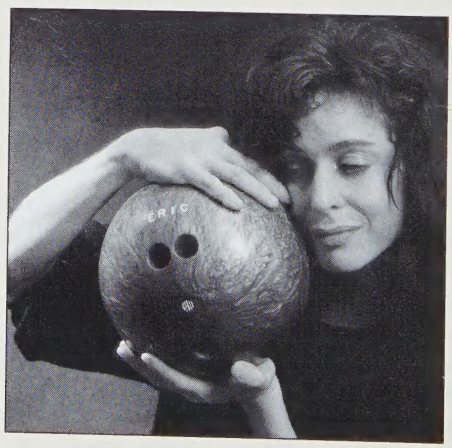


Life used to be like a perfect hors d'oeuvre.
Every cheese had its cracker. Every woman, her husband.
Toothpicks in every meatball. Everyone had a role.



But now the world's gone NACHOS.
Only the guys on top get the cheese.
Bean goo is oozing out of edges.
Everything is overlapping and sticky.

No wonder our relationships are a mess.



This text and cartoon are from Flash Rosenberg's humorous slide-performance Camping in the Bewilderness: Adventures of a Romantic Scientist. *Flash combines original cartoons, photographs and scientific logic in a monologue exploring the urban "Bewilderness." More daunting than any regular ole' wilderness, the* Bewilderness *refers to the chaotically absurd and emotionally complex territory of city life. Using the slide projector as her partner, Rosenberg creates a unique "live-storyboard" form of cartoon theater. For bookings contact Jeannine Frank at FRANK ENTERTAINMENT (310) 476-6735, frankent1@juno.com. For poetic discussion about the work, call (212) 643-0828.*